MR. DIMOCK

MRS. DENIS O'SULLIVAN

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MR. DIMOCK

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LIFE AND WAR LETTERS
OF
A CALIFORNIA BOY
WHO WAS KILLED FIGHTING
ON THE SOMME

MR. DIMOCK

BY

MRS. DENIS O'SULLIVAN

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Enter Mr. Dimock	11
II	Lady Freke	24
III	The Nortons	37
IV	Daphne	49
V	The Pond House	67
VI	Horace's Arrival	86
VII	Serbia in Oxfordshire	109
VIII	"The Angry Gods"	125
IX	Sir Francis Morrill	134
X	Katty's Dinner	147
XI	Daphne Again	154
XII	Crystal	162
XIII	Horace's Letter	166
XIV	The Sisters	172
XV	Alost and Bruxelles	187
XVI	The Heart of a Nun	196
XVII	The Nun in Harness	215
XVIII	Tea for the Village	221
XIX	Re-Enter Mr. Dimock	231

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CHAPTER		PAGE
XX	Daphne and Crystal	249
XXI	The Clearer Vision	253
XXII	"Dank U Wel, Engeland!"	259
XXIII	Holland	264
XXIV	Serbia in Love	284
XXV	A Long Way	302
XXVI	Primrose Time	310
XXVII	Death and Hazleby and Alicia	326
XXVIII	Re-Adjustment	336
XXIX	Exit Mr. Dimock	351

MR. DIMOCK

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CHAPTER I

ENTER MR. DIMOCK

When his friends in New York and Yonkers accused Horace Dimock of no longer loving his own country, he always answered, with his enchanting smile, "Does anybody come back to it as often as I do? Twenty times in twenty-two years?"

But when they carried it farther and reproached him for his devotion to England, he did not let them know that, for twenty times to New York, he had gone thirty to London.

What is it that calls the most American-American back to London?

Those old friends of Horace's, the Howard girls, always ascribed it to a supreme egotism latent in us all. They had not been the "Howard girls," (Katharine, the elder, was fond of saying) since the last century. Katty was now Lady Freke, and had openly thrown in her lot with England, announcing, with her air of deprecating infallibility, that something in you made you hang about the scene of your ancestors' crimes. This being so, how many crimes, or how many American ancestors, London must have harboured!

It must harbour many even now, this June of 1919.

Horace Dimock was on his way there. It would not be the same London, of even two years before, when he had last seen it; in the stress of war, to be sure, but astonishingly exalted; "carrying on" with a spirit that the Americans themselves, newly entering the arena, could not surpass. But since then, Horace had heard, hardship and suffering had banished the exaltation. Had seven months of peace restored it? Had his amazing English already returned to normal? Was the war already a half forgotten nightmare as it was in his own country? Above all, how did Americans now stand in that public estimation in which he had last seen them, angels of deliverance, acclaimed as coming out of the unknown West, to rescue civilisation?

Horace had found it very pleasant in 1917 to be acclaimed as a sort of up-to-date-god, and *"Bovo"* (his special commodity) the food of gods.

The great steadily pulsing liner which had brought him from the Argentine was nearing Southampton. Not usually an early riser, the lovely dawn had called him on deck by four o'clock; and as the vessel paced, rather than steamed, into the splendid pathway of the Channel, Horace realised, with the same thrill his first entry there had given him, how many years before! that France the wonderful, France the desired, France the land of his mother's people, lay close on his right, and on his left he would soon see England.

England had never seemed to him so desirable as France. It was his father's country, that is, the

Dimocks had come from there, and Horace had never cared much for his father. Still, it was always to England he returned for his longer visits, not to France. Lady Freke said once that many an American felt an abiding affection for England, as for a tranquil wife, while only flitting impulses drew him to France, as to an exigent mistress.

Katty Freke had odious moments of insight.

Horace turned his eyes from the rosy cloud on the right that meant France, to the luminous vagueness on the other horizon that was England. Katty Freke was herself behind that vagueness; some way he couldn't picture her keen inquisitive face, her monocle, her white hair, in that shifting softness.

How easily, on the contrary, he saw her sister Crystal's gentle eyes, and a certain serene way Crystal had of lifting her beautiful head! Beautiful Crystal McClinton was; Horace reassured himself anew as to his own discrimination, for it was to Crystal he was returning. He had not seen her for two years, and there was something like her (Horace had not expected to feel poetic at four a. m.) in the opalescent grey of this English morning.

Was it Crystal indeed who drew him back to England? (Horace did not permit himself to remember that it was always advantageous to his business to come to England.) Or was it the recent demand on his influence to keep his pretty ward, Daphne O'Brien, out of a convent? Horace liked the picture of these two entrancing creatures reaching out to him across the Atlantic. He had re-

sponded at some inconvenience to himself . . . it was a satisfaction to recall (in these days of a man's work, revictualling a hungry world), his prompt compliance. One does not desert a colossal business like his (he owned the great *"Bovo"* plant, the grazing for tens of thousands of cattle, and the means whereby they were converted into human nourishment. . . . "Horace puts in an ox," Katty Freke said, "and it comes out a little brown bottle") . . . one doesn't desert all that without serious inconvenience.

He heard himself telling Crystal how serious it was; he knew she would say tenderly, "O Horace! I *am* sorry." And he knew he would reassure her with the gallantry a Dimock always offered a pretty woman, even when she was, in a way, his own.

Beside . . . Horace was honest with himself . . . she hadn't asked him to come.

They had been overwhelmingly in love with each other four years earlier . . . one can be extraordinarily in love at forty-two, as Horace was then. . . . Crystal had been only thirty-six. Her old bore of a husband, Alexander McClinton, had been dead not quite a year when this happened, and her children were tiny. (Horace didn't admit to himself how he loathed children). But it seemed to him, looking back on this episode, in a life of episodes, that he had given Crystal more than he had bestowed on any other woman.

She was the most beautiful of his many loves. She had, above all the women he had known, the

art of making a man comfortable. Her home, whether it was in London, or Yonkers, or Oxfordshire, always offered just that combination of material comfort and mental ease that made living pure pleasure.

She was not so amusing as her sister Katty, she had not the same genius for acquiring notabilities as friends, but she had quite as much tact, and above all, she had beauty. Beauty of the calm grey-eyed unhurried type, a profile that was almost Greek, colour like a girl's, masses of brown hair, and (of course) a generous unquestioning devotion to him, Horace.

She had spent the winter and spring in California, and was perhaps even now approaching England. Her steamer might be just before or just behind his own. One could indeed picture, especially before the war, a procession of attractive Americans following or preceding anyone so appreciative as Horace knew himself to be. Horace smiled as he reflected that, whatever it was, Crystal's boat would not be, like his, a converted German liner. For a tolerant person Crystal presented some curious little rocks in the softly flowing stream of her tolerance.

She had never, for instance, even before the recent conflict, liked Germans. She had never sailed on their boats, although they had been far finer than American or English steamers—floating palaces with all super modern conveniences; Horace liked them. She would never stay in the most attractive pension in Venice, because it was run by a German. She had had, and unlike most people, had kept, some

very dear German friends; but for the race as a whole she had had, ever since he had known her, a strong, quiet, but ineradicable dislike. Curious, that! Other people's anti-German prejudice had so often been acquired after 1914.

Horace knew himself free from prejudice. Besides, the Argentine was full of Germans, and it would hamper the business if he failed to get along with them. Anyway, the war was over.

His recollection touched a moment on a warning article of Peter Norton's in a recent English weekly. Norton was one of Lady Freke's closest friends, as he was also the great editor of the day. What luck Katty had, really, in the people she knew! But if English readers shrugged their shoulders over an hypothetical renewal of the German menace, Americans certainly never credited it at all. Perhaps nine per cent of his fellow citizens were German or of German extraction, and admirable citizens they were, too.

Now if it were a question of the Irish . . . !

Horace did not, in his heart, like the Irish, although Tom McCarthy, Lady Freke's second husband, had been his best friend. And it was in Ireland that he had found Crystal. He was bound in generosity to admit that he owed something to Ireland.

Mrs. McClinton had gone there in the early days of her widowhood, with the tender but sometimes misplaced emotion of women, Horace reflected. She had even thought it a duty to make for Sligo, where her Alexander was born. Her sister Katty

loved the South, and would have taken her to the McCarthy country (poor Tom had died five years before), but Crystal felt that Nationalist Cork was indirectly an affront to the lamented McClinton of Ulster, so they compromised on Wicklow. There they spent, as Horace vividly remembered, a wonderful year.

During that year he and Blundell Freke were guests at a bachelor friend's some miles away. What more natural than for Horace to look up the "Howard girls," to take Freke and their host to call, and to drop back into the intimacy of their school days in Yonkers? To fall in love with Crystal McClinton seemed the most natural of all. Besides, he had always thought he would like a widow.

And Crystal, in that marvellous setting of the Wicklow Glens! Crystal's noble head against the Malure River, or by a rowan tree. . . . Crystal looking from the thick-silled window spaces of the old Drumgoff barrack ruins! Crystal in white always, those tiresome but beautiful children also in white; Crystal tall and grey-eyed as a Titian Madonna . . . mourning her Alexander perhaps, but unobtrusively; and frankly charmed and responsive when his own impetuous wooing began.

Was it wonderful that he had drifted into the fullest affection of his life that summer in Glenmalure?

Early morning and solitude and a white leviathan of comfort, moving you smoothly to your destination, must make for retrospect, Horace decided. He had loved Crystal for four years. But before

Crystal, how many women's figures! Leonora first, Merton Hazleby White's sister. White was Katty's first husband, which made Horace's earliest love Katty's sister-in-law . . . and his latest, her sister. . . . Droll, that!

And Daphne was Leonora's child. She might, he reflected a bit ruefully, have been his. How he would hate having a daughter of twenty-two! That attractive little milliner who had succeeded Leonora in his affections was twenty-two.

Well, after Leonora, many experiences. Years of hard work in a profession he did not like. Many comings and goings. He told himself that he had never forgotten Leonora. Perhaps her death made that image the fairer.

In the meantime he had gained a name for himself. He had published, at his own expense, a rather mediocre volume of poems. And finishing with the little milliner, and many little milliners or fond pretty creatures like her, married Alpha Johnson, daughter and heiress of old "Jim Town Johnson," of the first Tonopah gold strike.

Alpha was an earnest intelligent girl, not bad looking, well educated, according to her own lights; according to good old Jim Town's, a stupefying marvel of intellectual attainment. She and Horace met on some social service committees, and he was struck by the way she put through really great reforms amongst the poor. He never allowed himself to remember that it was old Jim Town's millions that made these reforms so easy. He said, and be-

lieved it (of course Alpha believed it), that his own modest success rendered the Johnson money, that would have dazzled him earlier, of no value in his eyes. It was Alpha's fine mind that drew him. And Alpha believed him again.

Horace sighed a long breath of relief as he looked toward the now evident English coast. How intolerable his ten years with Alpha had been! He had enjoyed the luxury, of course, the affluence of Johnson's huge fortune. The old man had made them live with him, in a Chicago mansion so magnificent, "the mint," Katty Freke had said, "could not be worse." She was only Katty McCarthy when she had visited them in those Chicago days, without a penny, but disappointingly unawed by the expensive glory about her.

But with the glory was the boredom. Some loyalty to himself, if not to Alpha, kept him a long time in the rôle of model husband. Even when old Jim Town speculated unwisely and a huge part of his money disappeared, with it the Chicago palace, Horace maintained an almost noble demeanour. To be sure there was still enough, even when the old millionaire died suddenly, and left confusion in his affairs. Not a hopeless confusion, for a smaller palace, near New York (in Montclair, on the Jersey side), and a remarkably sufficient income, replaced the old magnificence.

But Alpha, who had developed some obscure illness, did not improve in the new atmosphere, physically or mentally.

She still engaged in social service work, and was

the able chairman of many charities; there had been the entertainment of society successes. . . . Horace was too attractive a man not to make even a dull wife an asset. And Alpha was not dull. But the years had not brought that mellowness one expects from a good mind, ample leisure and great opportunity. And they had no children . . . perhaps children would have mellowed her. Their absence gave Alpha an unadmitted sense of failure. She had never been pretty, and now she was quite plain. She dressed extremely well, and Horace, to whom dress was important, was often proud of her appearance. But she nagged a little . . . fatal tendency in women! despite her abject admiration for her handsome lord; and conversation, which they had planned in honeymoon days to keep at an elevating level, had ceased between them long ago.

How remote all this—yet how bitterly he recalled it all! He had more and more frequented his clubs. He never accepted conventional invitations without his wife, but he more and more gave up evenings and week-ends to his musical and painter friends. Amongst the former was a splendid frank young creature, with a lovely voice, Patty Oliver. . . .

The affair with Patty did not bear recalling. It was the most serious of his amatory experiences during Alpha's life with him. She never knew the details, but various suspicions had sent her to a private detective agency, and she learned enough to suffer passionately.

Strangely enough it was quite a minor and brief affair, almost under her nose (her own dress-

maker's assistant) that led Alpha to extreme measures. She would divorce Horace to let him find his happiness in his own way, and to this end interviewed the little assistant, who was, unfortunately, dazzlingly pretty . . . decided that Horace's future lay there, wrote him wildly that he would never be loved as she had loved him, and betook herself to her father's old holdings in Nevada, whence she easily proved—as Horace was, naturally, not with her—desertion on his part as sufficient grounds for respectable divorce. The efficiency Horace had admired in courtship times had a final opportunity. She carried through the sale of the Montclair property, settled up her father's complicated estate, concluded a fair arrangement as to *Bovo,* made a firm will leaving all her money to Horace, and retired to a private hospital for an operation. This was in 1912. She lived till 1915, three years after the divorce, when her malady killed her. Lady Freke said she died of a broken heart and kidney complaint.

Katty Freke certainly had an acidulated facility of expression.

Evoking Katty's acidity brought him back to those lovely days at Glenmalure. If it was easy for him to fall a victim to Crystal's charm, how much easier for inexperienced Sir Blundell Freke, stodgy Member of Parliament, large, shy and fifty, to find Katty McCarthy (as she was then) irresistible. Her two boys, children of her first marriage, had seemed to Sir Blundell, in their gay Amer-

ican poise and freedom, almost as attractive as the lively parent. They in turn "took to" their mother's big friend, who tipped so munificently and shot so straight, with enthusiasm. Marrying him was almost too easy, the vivacious widow confided to Horace. But if she missed the sprightliness of her second husband, the little Irishman, or the simpler adoration of her first, the serious American, she must, Horace said to himself, have deeply enjoyed the title and prosperity of the Englishman.

Her boys had gone, after the thorough training of their English public school, to an American University. Then the war. . . . They must now be . . . Horace counted up . . . Merton, twenty-three, Hazleby, twenty-one. Horace hoped they were still in America.

Thinking of Katty's boys brought him back to their cousin Daphne. Her letter to "Uncle Horace," her guardian, announcing her unalterable intention of embracing the religious life, had been followed by a cablegram from Lady Freke:

"Only your direct influence likely prevent Daphne's entering convent."

It was evident that neither Katty nor Crystal had known in time to apprise him of his ward's aspiration. In any case, Katty Freke never wrote when she could telegraph.

A sailing next day from Buenos Aires made Horace's immediate departure possible, if inconvenient. He had meant, before this, to go to England a little later in the season, when material affairs as well as emotional ones would call him. Besides, Eng-

land would not be too comfortable in early 1919, and Horace liked his comfort. Crystal had taken a house in Oxfordshire, and planned to have it ready by August, when it would have better suited Horace's convenience.

Crystal, while not a fussy hostess, was a creature of definite arrangements. The new little house, which she had taken through a trusted friend, without seeing, was miles from anywhere. Furnishing it would mean time and thought; furnishing it especially for him, as chief of the expected guests, would be an important matter.

Horace looked complacently toward the English coast that sheltered Crystal's unknown little house, if indeed it did not already shelter Crystal. It was worth coming from the other side of the round globe for a man to be as sure as he was of the charm, the comfort, of a waiting home. There would be other guests. Crystal observed the conventions just enough. Inconvenient? Perhaps.

But it was for him it would all be waiting.

CHAPTER II.

LADY FREKE

HORACE had the usual satisfaction in landing at an English port. He had expected a survival of war conditions, but there was little to bother one . . . easy custom requirements, courteous officials, a prompt departure. The familiar Hampshire landscape was like a fresh green garden after the long days at sea. He was disposed to like even the bad breakfast one gets on an English train . . . pleased and grateful to get breakfast at all. Were there evidences of the war about? Horace did not look for them.

Katty Freke had always said, "Thank God for three things in England—kippers, politics and servants!"

So Horace, with the *Times* unfolded at a well-informed leading article, with a broiled bloater before him, and an attentive waiter behind, felt anew the sense of comfort this old country invariably gave him, knowing meanwhile what a radiantly attractive London lay just ahead.

It was as radiant as he hoped. Absurd to talk of the lingering discomfort and sordidness of the

war, thought our traveller, closing his eyes to all that he did not wish to see. The taxi sped deftly out of the congestion around Waterloo Station, into the June warmth of quieter streets. Then across the river, past Westminster, where Mr. Dimock inclined, as twenty times before, to salute those historic buildings. The American with English blood in his veins certainly feels that he has "come home" when he reaches that splendid centre of the world.

This particular American tried not to grin fatuously, looking back at Parliament Square as they turned toward a bit of grey blocked street that led into St. James's Park. Gorgeous! What a world to come back to! He revelled in the greenness as they slowed down to regulation Park speed, in the June morning, in the eternal haze of London, which gives to the meanest and ugliest building a dream-like greyness. And to be in the heart of the biggest city in the world, with its many-century-old houses so near him, yet to be as alone as if he were deep in country silence!

These miles of park in the midst of endless houses . . . what an anomaly! And all his . . . this beauty, this tradition, the glory of a thousand years. Horace felt more than ever that his absence in America, the absence of his family, that is, for a bare three hundred years, meant nothing. He had as much right to come back to it as any Englishman of them all.

The casual recollection of his enthusiasm that very morning for France chilled him a bit. Hor-

ace was honest with himself. He admitted with a fine frankness that perhaps he was not the most constant of mortals. Of course another way of putting it was to say that keen appreciation of beauty necessarily made for a certain inconstancy, . . . Leonora, Alpha, Patty Oliver, Crystal, and various minor charmers flitted through his mind. Then he recalled, with a warm glow of virtue, his four years of absolutely untouched loyalty to Crystal.

Who could call him inconstant after that?

They came out opposite Apsley House, where the rather insignificant statue of the most significant of British warriors faces his former dwelling. The walled-in windows on the Hyde Park side recall the ugly moment when the crowd turned on that conqueror of a greater conqueror. Horace's sympathies went with Napoleon, not Wellington. He rather liked those walled-in windows. Only Horace, perhaps, would have remembered, in that moment, the war of early 1800, and closed his eyes on that of early 1900.

Then into Knightsbridge and so to his excellent hotel, where a room overlooking trees and green spaces was reserved for him each year.

A telegram awaited him from Crystal:

"Arrived Thursday. Pond House enchanting. Wire before coming."

That meant she was making ready for him, the darling! Well, he'd give her two days more. Having telephoned his telegram in answer to hers, his

next thought was of her sister. He rang up Lady Freke.

"Yes, Lady Freke was at home. She knew his steamer had arrived that morning. Would he come over to luncheon? She would be alone."

"'Here is Ancona. Yonder is the Sea'——" burbled Horace through the telephone. "My dear girl, one always quotes when one arrives in England."

"Here's Hyde Park Corner, there Cadogan Square!"

(Like all Americans, Horace was pleased with himself for saying Caduggan correctly.) "I'll be around in five minutes."

Lady Freke's house—why did not one say Sir Blundell Freke's? Horace pondered—was one of a row of low-stepped ugly dwellings, the very expression of red-brick affluence, looking neatly at the railed-in Square. But this was the outside. The elephantine butler, much too big for the tiny entrance, greeted the caller affably. Lady Freke had only men servants—except for her own maid. Inside, the familiar blue grey walls with the dashing blue of a row of Hiroshigi prints behind Grimmer's correct head, gave Horace the usually delightful sense of the incongruous that marked everything pertaining to Katty Freke. The polished stairs that led up to the drawing room, the *Unknown Woman* who looked at him inscrutably as he passed her mellow tinted beauty set in the deep blues of the landing, all pleased him. Not less the sudden bloom of light and colour as Grimmer opened the

drawing room door for him. Masses of Katty's favourite blush roses in blue jars; the blue grey walls, the blue and gold and grey of well chosen furnishings, with the warmer note of old rose and grey rugs; and over the high fine mantel a radiant portrait of Crystal, making the central point of the room—Crystal in white, against the sunshine, her arms filled with pink roses.

Horace smiled in pleasure. The long low-ceilinged room ended in French windows which looked over the green Square. There was not too much in the room, but he knew by experience that every chair was comfortable, that for every seat was a second near enough to make talk easy; that the books you wanted always seemed at hand; that the light from the long windows, or from the lamps at night, fell exactly right when you took up your book. The Howard girls had always been famous for making a "comfy" home. This was more, it was rich and glowing as a jewel. It was also just the right setting for Lady Freke's trim figure in the pale grey she affected when she appeared joyfully to greet him.

"You were a good boy to come so promptly!" giving him a hand as smooth and creamy white as her face. "But none too promptly. Daphne is not yet behind the bars, but she's in the dock, and a lovely prisoner she'll make too if they get her."

"Is she half as lovely as her aunt this minute?" smiled Horace.

Katty screwed her monocle into her eye as she stood on tiptoe to look into a mirror.

"There was a sign in a second-hand shop down the road," she said, "on a rather good old chair. 'Would pay to do over'—Well, I'm done over . . . nice of you to say it paid."

"Who did you, and what did she do?"

"Only my maid. It's this black rosette in the upholstery" (pointing to her white hair), "and we do the hair à la Mme. Maintenon now, naughty—naughty, but attractive."

"Very," conceded Horace. "Now tell me about Daphne."

They settled themselves amongst the blue cushions of the Chesterfield, Horace regarding his companion with an admiring scrutiny. Was it possible she was nearer fifty than forty? She was not beautiful like Crystal, but she was so trim, so "smart" in the English sense, so confident—her white hair made her pale face so youthful; her monocle and the black velvet touch on the white hair were so wicked; the grey shod feet under her rustling skirts so tiny—that Horace said sincerely, looking his old friend up and down,

"Katty, you're a wonder!"

"I'm well preserved, if you mean that. But wait until you see Crystal. She's more than ever like the 'rosy Aurora' that was our despair when we struggled with Virgil. She is a wonder if you like—but of course she's six years younger than you or I, Horace."

She was studying her guest curiously. Horace knew she had never satisfied herself as to his exact standing with Crystal.

"If I looked no older than you—But now—Daphne. What am I to do about the child?"

"Child! She'll make you think she's the mother of the world. Be prepared to feel like a very small, very naughty boy when you go to see Daphne."

"But may I go? Just how far has she progressed in her convent path?"

"I'm to take you there day after tomorrow," his hostess answered. "You might meet me in the chapel at nine. You could be saying your prayers there till I come. I'm sure you need to."

"More than you think. But first I must know something of Daphne's mental attitude," Horace put it tolerantly.

"Its altitude, not attitude. She's in the clouds, you'll see. But she is only a postulant so far, she isn't even a novice. . . . I don't know. . . . When I cabled, I was at my wits' end. I couldn't see Merton's niece in the cloistered life. She's too practical, like him, too necessary outside. I can't tell you what executive ability she developed during the war, not to mention her charm."

"Then she has charm? Whose?" asked Horace, thinking of Leonora.

"Not Leonora's," Katty seemed to have read his thought. "Leonora was the Dresden shepherdess type." (Katty ought to know; after all, Leonora was her own sister-in-law.) "Daphne is Diana, a virgin goddess. An up-to-date Diana, I admit, with an obsession for Rome."

"What an extraordinary mixture!" Horace rose a little restlessly.

"A mixture, yes, but charm! Full of it. We've all gone down before her like nine pins. It's something tangible, like her lovely brows, or her curious crisp voice."

Horace put the Dresden shepherdess behind him. "But Diana? That would suggest that the celibate life was O.K."

"Another mix-up. Daphne is a born mother. Of course she'll end by mothering her nuns. But what wouldn't I give to see her mothering some handsome boy, a lover, I mean? And later his babies."

"You're incorrigible, Katty. How about your own boys?" asked Horace.

"I should say to myself, 'Go on your knees and give thanks to God, Katty Freke!' if one of them was lucky enough to get her. But they're still in Mesapotamia, bad luck! with Blundell, which is good luck. I wish you were younger, Horace. I'd make you kidnap her as she comes from communion tomorrow."

"It's easy to see your ladyship knows little of the true faith, even less than I do. She'll be in a state of grace, and Apollo himself wouldn't have a look in."

"I've a mind to take Stefan there," said Lady Freke absently. "Only she's too lovely just now, and I'd not have the right to risk the boy's peace of mind."

"Stefan is . . . ?" Horace hazarded.

"Stefan Dakovich. You really spell it *Dakovic* and pronounce it *Darkovitch.* The most beautiful boy I know, Merton and Hazleby being unfinished

aborigines beside him. He's the product of such a fine old civilisation! The real thing . . . and Serb. But Serbia is as forgotten as the war." Katty's voice took on an unusual bitterness. Horace wondered; what had Serbia to do with it?

"But Daphne"—Katty went on—"that lovely, keen, intelligent creature immured in the fusty traditions of the 16th century! I can't bear it. You must do what you can, Horace Dimock. She respects your opinion. And you're Catholic born. You've a right to an opinion. Crystal and I, poor pagans, are not worth counting, spiritually."

Horace studied his old friend, who was so perennially a new friend, almost affectionately. "You and Crystal may not count in that cloister where little Daphne is, but you're the two best women I ever knew!"

"And 'tis yourself has known a few," said his hostess wickedly, slipping off the couch where she'd been curled like an eighteen-year-old. "But here's Grimmer. Let's go down to luncheon."

"You may descend to American slang, Katty, or play you're Irish now and then, but you still say luncheon, not lunch."

"Thanks be!" replied Lady Freke, as they went down together. "There are some depths I won't descend to. Lunch is one—pants for trousers is another, postal for post card, photo for photograph, phone for telephone—they're all vile."

When they faced each other, not at the big table, but at a tiny one in the window, with Grimmer and a shy first footman like presiding genii of Brit-

ish extraction, Katty asked how much of his time he meant to bestow upon her?

"I shall be busy for a few days in the city," answered Horace. "But will you dine with me and do a theatre this evening?"

"No, I am dining with the Peter Nortons, and you must come along. Meredith Dyfed will be there. He's just back from the Balkans. Grimmer, please telephone Mrs. Norton at once, and leave word that I am bringing Mr. Dimock tonight."

"If you and Norton are going to argue on Home Rule it'll be no place for me," said Horace firmly.

"You've been lost in the jungle, Horace. Home Rule! an antiquated name. We *had* Home Rule. It came into existence automatically in May, 1914, as you know. Then the war killed it, the war and Sinn Fein." Katty bit into the roll viciously. "We played the game, we Home Rulers. Sinn Fein didn't; and doesn't."

"What does Norton say?" asked Horace.

"He's playing the game too. After all these years of fighting us, and he Irish . . . he says now, quite simply, like a good loser, 'The time's come when all Irishmen, Unionist and Nationalist, must put their shoulders to the wheel.' "

"But will they?"

Katty clouded a moment. "There are extremists in all countries. And the Irish extremist is always a knave or a fool. He'll put his own neck in the noose, or someone else's. There'll be knaves North,

and fools South, you'll see. And the fools are now in the majority."

"You have lost John Redmond since I was here," said Horace, remembering Katty's veneration for the great Home Ruler.

Real tears came into Lady Freke's eyes. It was the first time her friend had ever seen them there. "I can't talk of that," she said.

Horace waited a moment, and then said comfortably, "Do they still accept you without question, the Irish, I mean—with your American birth, your English name? How do you take them in?"

Katty smiled good humouredly; "I used to say I was Irish by marriage—when poor Tom was here—but now I know 'tis by conviction. 'More Irish than the Irish'—never was there a truer word."

"Mrs. Norton's love, your ladyship," said Grimmer, re-entering benignantly, "and will be very pleased to see Mr. Dimock."

"Thank you, Grimmer. There's this day filled, Horace. Tomorrow I'm full up! But day after tomorrow you'll meet me at nine to see our little postulant? And when do you go down to Oxfordshire?"

"Crystal doesn't wish me to come yet." Horace tried to say it lightly. "I thought I'd do some necessary business here, and go down Tuesday."

"I'm going down Wednesday on the four ten. Will you come along?" (Again Katty's wicked little side glance.)

"That would be delightful," said Horace, hoping

he concealed his dismay. Not to meet Crystal alone after this long absence! However, he rather ostentatiously made a note of the time in his little book:

"Paddington, four ten, Wednesday."

Their talk was mostly gossip after this. Grimmer and the shy footman put the coffee on the table and withdrew. Horace, lighting his cigarette at the match Katty held for him, said contentedly,

"A rattling good little luncheon, my dear girl. You and Crystal are born hostesses."

"It's the easiest, because it's the most amusing rôle on any stage," answered Lady Freke. "And in England 'tis so easy to be a good hostess! When I remember what it used to mean at home, in New York or Yonkers!"

"You always seemed to do it easily at home," reflected Horace.

"You never knew the anguish behind that ease! The incompetent servants, the cost of everything! And a certain deadly conformity required of you in returning dinners, in having the same things Mrs. Brown or Mrs. White had, only better. No, there was fun in it, of course, but you were so hampered. Yet no American will believe you can be a thousand times less conventional in England, less restricted, even now, than——"

"Than in the land of the free?"

"The land of the unfree. London is the only place in the world where you can do exactly as you like—your only true democracy."

"It's part of your incongruity, my dear, to be an American, an Irish irreconcilable, and yet a loyal Britisher."

"Only I'm not a Britisher," protested Katty—"hateful name! I'm a Londoner. Don't you know how Californians always answer when you ask their nationality? 'I'm Californian.' The rest of us say 'I'm American.' Well, so am I a Londoner—a London Fenian, made in Yonkers, U. S. A."

"And I'm a dawdler," said Horace, rising. "Pretending I'm a business man. Let me go back to my swine, Circe."

"I thought it was beef, not pork."

"It's fat enough just now to be pork."

"You mean it's paying, your *Bovo,* even now, after the war?"

"A home paper I got this morning said 'Pork is up some'—but I assure you *Bovo* is up some and then some. We're a great people—the liberties we take with the English language!"

"Sure, we've the right to," said his hostess, following as he turned resolutely to go. "Au revoir, mon enfant—I'll see you tonight at the Nortons. And be at your prayers on time Monday!"

CHAPTER III

THE NORTONS

Horace stood that evening in the shadow at the end of the Nortons' long garden. It was after eight, but warm afternoon still lingered on the grey-brown houses, over the rose bushes, and on Aileen's white figure, as she appeared opposite, on the iron balcony leading from the drawing room. Another figure descended the steps, looking back as though for instructions. Even at that distance, Horace could see how tall, how lightly held and slim a figure it was; no Englishman would walk like that. Who was Aileen's young friend? Horace twinkled a bit, recalling the variety and number of Aileen's swains.

But as this one came slowly toward him down the long, straight gravelled path common to London back gardens, Horace was struck by a definite unlikeness to any type he knew. An American boy would have come at a rush; an English one with some consciousness; a German stiffly. Was this boy a Frenchman? No; too beautiful, Horace decided, even from there. Italian? An Italian might have those fine cut lines; and the boy's brown flushed skin, something lofty in the carriage of the head, might have been a young aristocrat's in ancient

Rome. Still, the watcher was sure he was not Italian.

Horace had your real American's enthusiasm for his own sex, and the minor poet's appreciation of beauty. He moved forward now with genuine pleasure to get Aileen's message. The stranger stopped short, almost as though he were about to salute Dimock, and said carefully, with hardly any accent, but evidently choosing every word,

"Madam Norton says I must call you. Dinner is there."

Horace, who was not short, had to look up as he smiled his answer. The boy smiled back, but with no flash of white teeth like an Italian's; rather with a gravity beyond his years.

"You're an old friend too, in this delightful house?" queried Horace, as they walked side by side up the path.

"No, it is my first time. My friend, Captain Boyovich, he brings me here. But I often visit the friend of Madam Norton, the Lady Freke, who is also the friend of Boyovich."

"Ah, then you are—you are from the Balkans?" (Horace shared his countrymen's profound ignorance of southeastern Europe.)

"Serbia," said the young man with the same unyouthful seriousness.

Horace recoiled a little. If Katty Freke had been "up against" this proposition, she would have said, "Bless my soul, you don't look it!" and Horace wished for her lightness of touch in a difficult moment. This boy a Serbian? One of a nation

given to murder in high places; one of that wild unknown country commonly put down as semi-Russian, semi-German?

"We know so little in England and over in New York," he said awkwardly, "about those countries, and I have been in South America during the war. What part of Serbia do you come from?"

"Belgrade. But I am Montenegrin—my name is Dakovich." Again the movement toward a salute.

"Mine is Dimock," and Horace held out his hand with the cordiality that always won him friends.

Lake Freke's voice assailed them from the balcony.

"Did he say 'Pleased to meet you,' Stefan? All Americans say that till they know better."

Dakovich took the low steps three at a time to kiss her hand. She left it in his with a frank affection surprising in Katharine Freke. "If you had learned to kiss hands as these Serbian officers do, you'd be irresistible, Horace," she said. "There is a directness about it I find adorable."

Dakovich kissed her hand again—smiling down on her, but not speaking.

"Lady Freke would never find anything *I* did adorable," chaffed Horace, as the three went in together.

Aileen came forward with another stranger. "It's Boyovich," she said. "You don't know a thing about him, Horace, and he speaks no English, so you never will. But he's a lamb."

"He's more than that," came Meredith Dyfed's

voice. "He's a *guslar,** an hereditary bard." Captain Boyovich bowed and smiled, shaking hands with Horace. He had none of the younger Serbian's silent, rather bitter beauty—he was shorter, older, very alert, with blue eyes like a child, and the spontaneity of an unconscious child. Horace, looking from one to the other (he had already seen Mr. Meredith Dyfed) was curiously aware of a new order of personality, almost a new race, with a charm and finish that surprised him. Were these boys of that class of young officers who had wantonly murdered Alexander and Draga so long ago? Or were they of the desperate band struggling through the Albanian snows in that retreat that, even from South America, had seemed stupendous? But they appeared so gentle, these two, with the softness of over-civilisation. He had understood that the Serbs loved fighting above all things, that they were a wild, uncouth race. Here were two (he would stake his life on it), two good sports, and gentlemen; more, English or American gentlemen. How could he fit them in with newspaper stories? How could he fit them in with anything he knew? They were a fresh experience. To what people could he affiliate them? Certainly not to the Americans. Nor to those others he understood, the South Americans, not to any Europeans he had encountered.

Lady Freke, who had been watching him, said in his ear, "They're the kings of Europe, these Serbians. I'm a convert too. They're the elect, the

* Guslar—pronounced guss- (like puss) lar.

aristocrats, in a world still made up of a German-English-French-bourgeoisie."

"But why have we, except for war stories, known nothing about them?" asked Horace perplexedly.

"Yes, why? There's been a conspiracy of silence. We've known worse than nothing. Serbia has been a byword, a reproach . . . England's fault. She broke off relations when they killed their abominable king and queen in 1903 . . . a good killing, if ever there was one. . . . But we've known nothing, nothing. Meredith Dyfed here has known. Wretch!" she added, turning to Dyfed. "Why haven't you told us what Serbia really was?"

"Why not try reading my books?" quizzed Dyfed. "Dear lady, I've been telling you for fourteen years."

"Yes," put in Aileen. "As Cherâdame told us for fifteen, about the German menace. But nobody listened."

"We have all listened to Meredith Dyfed," objected Lady Freke. "And he has never once said that the Serbians were the entrancing people they are."

Stefan kissed her hand again—with his serious smile. And Boyovich, when it was explained to him, kissed the other one. But Dyfed himself laughed a little.

"You listen when I take tea with you, dear lady, —the best tea in London, I admit. But we've never happened to get on to the Serbians. You've made me talk till I was ashamed of myself—yet we didn't get round to the best of it all. You listen too well.

I'd rather do the listening, any day, with Lady Freke for talker."

"Do you wonder he's called 'The Finest-Gentleman-in-Europe-Second?' I believe that Horace was called something like that in Yonkers——"

"In the Argentine, too. I have it for a fact," said Aileen. "But we'll go in now. There's no use in waiting for that man of mine."

"Peter Norton late is prompter than the rest of London early," said Lady Freke, putting her hand on Stefan's arm. Dyfed, who spoke Serbian, followed with Boyovich. Horace, as the new comer, took in his hostess.

"Katty is without shame," said Aileen, as they settled themselves. "She adores my husband, and it's too open."

"I adore every handsome man," retorted Lady Freke.

"All bow!" said Horace solemnly.

"You've a right to," thus Katty, with a touch of brogue.

"Funny, you are all handsome," commented Aileen. "Something I've never before seen at a London table—four Apollos, my word!"

"Dakovich is the belle of the boarding house," put in Katty practically. The boy saluted, silent, with his grave smile. "But who comes next?"

"Mr. Dimock," asserted Aileen. "Though Meredith Dyfed runs him close—but in an Oberammergau sort of way (as has been said before). You're last, Boyovich, but you won't be after Peter comes."

"Pleece?" asked Boyovich.

"We're calling you a tableful of good-lookers," answered Katty. "Mr. Dyfed will explain it to you. Never have these mortal eyes beheld four such handsome men at once in the one room. Curiously, we women are as plain as you are not."

"Speak for yourself, Katty Freke," said Aileen. "Captain Boyovich here has just said I was as beautiful as his sister."

"I always remind them of their mother," gloomed Lady Freke.

"And the Lord he knows you're the most unmotherly person on the planet," Horace put it feelingly.

"She is the true moth-er," interrupted Dakovich, with a sudden flush. "She is *Majka,** mother, to me."

"Nice child," said Katty affectionately. "But there you are! I make every man think of his mother. What could be more disheartening?"

"Yet you're the youngest of us all, in gaiety, in life," adjudged Dyfed.

"I'm forty-six." Lady Freke liked to take the breath away, even of old friends. "I've had three husbands—and if an East African lion eats Blundell, I shall have a fourth, I warn you all."

"I've had only one," pouted the hostess, "but Peter Norton is more trying than a dozen." (This last for her husband's benefit, as he came in hurriedly.)

There was a general stir of reproach and affection. Peter Norton stood pale and rigid by his

* Majka—pronounced Mye-ka (mother).

wife—touched her cheek absently, and crossed to Lady Freke.

"Katty, 'tis always good to see you!" He held her hand a long time, looking at her with unseeing brilliant eyes.

The Serbians had risen to greet him, and Horace and Meredith Dyfed waited with the understanding of old friends. For Peter Norton, even when he relaxed in a familiar environment, gave the impression of a nervous power, of an inescapable knowledge, that held you tense. He was a man who had done great things during the war, as before and after. More than most Londoners, perhaps, he made world-wheels go round—and you always felt that there was a possibility of catching him in the act.

He dropped Katty's hand as casually as he had held it; passed to the Serbians with genuine distress at his own neglect; around to Horace—whom he had not seen for two years; and to Dyfed, who was his best personal friend, and his keenest journalistic competitor—but only to cut short his own greetings.

"What's ahead?" he burst out. "What's to come of this new Serbian situation? Is the world to take fire again? Dyfed, you know more of the Balkans than anyone. Who's responsible for the Dalmatian impasse?"

"All of us, Peter," laughed Dyfed bitterly. "England, France, the United States. And if I know my Serbs, they'll fight for every inch they consider their own down there."

Stefan translated this in low, intense tones to Boyovich. Both faces were white under their tan. Horace would have given a good deal to know what desperation, hatred, conviction, lay not quite hidden behind those fine foreign masks.

"Peter Norton, if you hold up our dinner any longer, I'll leave you!" hurled Aileen, at her lord.

Norton sank into his chair, and motioned the soup away. Katty, with a nod to Aileen, motioned it back, put the spoon into Norton's hand, and firmly dipped the hand toward the plate.

"Eat, Peter, and Meredith Dyfed shall talk," she said. "Talk, pretty creature, at once!" But Dyfed was now speaking with Boyovich in Serbian, the stranger obviously moved, the Briton hiding his own excitement.

"They both know it may mean war," said Stefan under his breath to Lady Freke. "We may have to fight again, and we are so tired of fighting."

"You poor kid!" she smiled pitifully at him. "How long have you been fighting?"

"All of this last war. Part of the Second Balkan War, Madame."

"And you are now—how old?"

"Twenty-two years, Madame."

"And how many of them have been fighting years?"

"I think a hundred. But my country has had five hundred. Five hundred years, Madame! . . . a country that loves peace. And this day . . . perhaps you do not know . . . this is Kossovo Day. On this day we held back the Turks in 1389. On

this day a year ago we began our last offensive . . . to regain our beloved land!"

He had raised his voice ever so slightly, and Meredith Dyfed turned a suddenly illuminated face toward him.

"Kossovo!" he said. "Of course, of course!" and to Horace's amazement, rose from his place and shook hands with each Serbian, a flush on his usually cold face. "The world doesn't realise, even yet, what Kossovo means to history, to civilisation."

Horace certainly didn't realise. He didn't realise the Dalmatian situation now, nor why these strangers, not to speak of his English friends, took it with such deathly seriousness.

"Surely," he began tentatively, "you don't count Italian aggression down there as really formidable?"

Norton turned a haggard cheerfulness upon him. "The Italians are our friends and allies. Conditions are just now extraordinarily delicate. We have offended the Italians and have not aided the Serbs."

Dakovich again translated for his friend.

"Freedom!" Boyovich ejaculated in his halting English. "We ask only freedom . . . for all . . . Serbs, Croats, Dalmatians . . . freedom!" As the older Serb spoke, the younger looked around the table; at Horace as though he defied him; at Norton as though he must explain. Then at Dyfed for understanding. There was something unhurried and splendid in his own youthful declaration after this:

"If one mile of our land is taken we shall fight. The living will gather from the end of the world. The dead will rise from their graves."

Norton, since last speaking, had not looked up from his own plate. He had stopped eating, and sat immovable. Katty glanced at the others. Boyovich was white as cheese, his blue eyes like fires. Meredith Dyfed was also pale, but smiling cynically to himself. She turned from Horace's kind, interested gaze in some impatience. What did he know about it? Then to Dakovich. The boy was looking at her, sadly, as from a great distance,—poor, beautiful Stefan, who had said she was a moth-er to him, and who perhaps must now leave her, and this wonderful London, to go back to the fighting he hated!

She felt her eyes fill, and put out her hand impulsively to touch the boy's clenched fist on the white cloth. Horace was studying her in some surprise. His interest in this refound Europe was still in persons, not in politics. Katty Freke had never attracted him as she had many men, but she was surely amazing. He realised that, with his American keenness of comprehension, this Italian-Serb situation ought to interest him as it did Norton and Dyfed. Why was he too not absorbed in this strange Balkan business? But Katty was amazing. He wondered if Crystal would interest him in the same way? From Crystal's sister he looked toward Aileen, that charming, irresponsible —and yes, clever creature. She was dressing a

salad and too intent on it for the moment to notice the silence.

Norton looked up at last.

"Rapacity, stupidity, fear . . . those are behind this business," he said. "They've been behind every country that has attacked Serbia for half a thousand years. That gallant little country! Jove!" he broke out suddenly. "It's been the bravest country in the world. And if we stand by and see her despoiled again . . ."

"If we do," said Aileen, unexpectedly, "to Hell with us!" and, Aileen fashion, stood up, and held her glass toward the Serbians. "To the bravest country in the world!"

"She's right," Norton said, as they all stood quickly. "Gentlemen," he added more formally, in what his wife called "Peter's grand manner," "I am proud to have you at my table this night. History is being made . . . by you more than by any of us. But what will come out of it, God alone knows!"

CHAPTER IV

DAPHNE

Horace gave up the following day, Sunday, to his correspondence. But next morning he walked across Kensington Gardens from his hotel. If London had been exhilarating the day of his arrival, it was intoxicating now. The end of June, at eight in the morning, thought our American, with all that life in London offers a man! The world again at peace, his own country and his own affairs prospering amazingly—— And when, as this morning, they had (a new concession to Americans) given him grape fruit to begin his breakfast on, and excellent coffee (the old tradition of bad English coffee was fading away) had that man not cause to feel serene? He would see Crystal tomorrow—beautiful Crystal in the peaceful Oxford country—but at forty-six one is not impatient, even in love.

Eight o'clock in London is like seven in America—the world is so much later astir. His walk across the Park was solitary, except for a battered cheery individual in a greenish coat who was setting out some of those green iron chairs you pay a penny for—or was it now tuppence? Horace bade him good morning, and liked the "Mornin', Guv'nor" he got in return. When he reached the Serpentine, he

leaned awhile against the heavy balustrade of the bridge, looking east where the early sun caught the water. Not a human being in sight—yet here he stood, in the centre of London, which meant the centre of the world, as much alone as if he had been miles out in the Pampas.

Katty had given him some of her special cigarettes the day before. He lighted one of them now —they were Irish, she had said—grown, rolled and sold in Ireland. Hard to believe, but whatever they were, excellent. Irish! Was it true the Home Rule question would now settle itself? What peace to hear no more about it!

But another of Katty's sayings returned to irritate him a little:

"There's no man living doesn't swank a bit if he has any Irish in him!"

He, Horace, had no Irish, absolutely none, the Lord be praised! But, continuing his walk, he thought, there's apparently no getting away from the race. Never, never, did you escape some form of Irish activity. Now with the world so tranquil again this divine June, 1919, (that Serbian nonsense wouldn't amount to much), why must the Irish question, even on the way to settlement, why should it everlastingly make for discord?

Norton had written him, months before the war, that his Ulster lot would fight Home Rule to the last gasp. Now he was, if Lady Freke proved right, for conciliation. Conciliate an Irishman? That meant only gross flattery—Bah! You needn't yield him an inch; everything could go on as it

had; but you pretended you yielded everything; you gave him the semblance; you kept the reality. He knew from his own dealings with the race in South America. These arrogant English could have had the business settled half a century before if they had gone on what Lady Freke called the "buttering" principle—Bah! There was no getting away from them in private life, either. Was he not on his way that moment to urge one of them back to the paths of sanity?

It was natural to wonder what that particular Irish problem, what Daphne, would be like. Not Leonora, Katty had said—evidently calmer—a stronger character generally, and more beautiful than the mother.

Leonora had been pretty, fragile, dainty, with enormous nervous force, in spite of her daintiness. Was any love like first love? Nothing so enduring, so absorbing, above all, so delicate, had he ever known as his passion for Leonora. But he had no money in those days; he was only nineteen; his father destined him for a profession he hated, the mining engineer's; and in his long absence at college on the other side of the continent, Leonora had suddenly married Desmond O'Brien. There was one child, Daphne Frances—Daphne to please some romance in the mother, Frances because Desmond O'Brien's child must, being Roman Catholic, have a saint's name.

Poor Leonora! When Horace returned to Yonkers, his training behind him (how he had hated that raw western university!), there was a scene

he shuddered even now to remember. Leonora still loved him. She had married Desmond in a fit of pique; she had bitterly resented bearing Desmond's child; she cried out that she would leave child and home and good name to run away with Horace.

And when Horace, who had already a new love (a pretty milliner, who was absurdly devoted to him for six months), gently put her off, she grew desperate. He took pains (for Desmond was absent) to lock up his host's revolver and razors. Horace was only twenty-one, but his knowledge of hysterical women was intuitive—and already varied. One does not remain a Simon Stylites on a lonely pillar when one spends two years away from family, neighbourly strictures, and inquisitive friends, with a profession one hates, and a thwarted love affair behind one.

But Leonora went on living. He did not see her for ten years.

When she was dying, at thirty, of tuberculosis, she sent for him. (Desmond had been dead for several years.) He, Horace, must be Daphne's guardian—poor Leonora did not know how he loathed children—but she remembered only that she still loved him, that he was wealthy, that he had no children of his own. He was much moved by that pathetic death scene. Nothing would content poor Leonora but dying with her hand in his; and of course he had made the most satisfying promises as to Daphne's future. Promises he had kept, too.

The girl was now twenty-two. His guardianship

had come to an end when she was eighteen. He had then turned over the little capital her mother had left, well invested, so that Daphne had at least the means of existence.

She had been the most engaging child. Far prettier than poor Leonora; but then Desmond O'Brien was rather a handsome fellow. Engaging, but very definite; and somewhat disconcerting to a man with no understanding of children. Her education had been in the Convent of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, whence she wrote him once a month that she was perfectly happy.

One year she had spent in France, in the Order's best House there, and her holidays were always with Crystal, who loved her dearly, or with Katty, who was by way of being an aunt—(Merton Hazleby White having been Leonora's brother)—so that Horace could feel that she had all possible advantages.

Her holidays had never happened to coincide with his visits to either Yonkers or England, so that he had only hearsay to go on, and Daphne's own dutiful letters. Had those letters possessed any of the child's own charm, Horace would undoubtedly have become her admirer, even in the rôle of guardian, for the epistolary art was a very important one to Horace. Half of Crystal's claim on his continued devotion lay in her really astonishing letters. One would have expected Katty, the brilliant sister, to write good letters, especially in the land of good note and letter writing, but it was Crystal, who seldom sparkled, who made no epigrams, who did

not know the great of this world unless Katty brought them to her; it was Crystal who wrote a letter you could read a dozen times with enjoyment of its humour and fine turns of expression; not to mention an individual and beautiful handwriting. Horace had never received letters like hers. He wrote a delightful letter himself. Crystal thought it something astonishingly fine; so had thought Alpha, Patty, and Leonora. Even Peter Norton had maintained a flattering correspondence with him.

He brought his reflections back to Daphne with an effort. At eighteen she had announced, when she wrote to thank him warmly, if somewhat dryly, for his then concluding guardianship, that she wished to embrace the religious life—to enter a convent, in short. Horace, born and educated a Catholic, had not the reverence a non-Catholic sometimes entertains for anything so sublime, so self-sacrificing, as that renunciation of the world. He therefore put it to her, in his long letter, that if she really felt, as she said she did, any gratitude to him for his eight years' charge of her interests, would she make him the return of postponing her decision by half that time?

Daphne had unwillingly acquiesced. Horace knew that both Crystal and Katty had mothered the charming girl, and would go on doing so. If the world was to offset the convent—the world had certainly a fair chance at the hands of those two wonderful and diverse women. Beside, the war was on. He knew both sisters would find enough for her to do.

But the moment the four years were up, Daphne had written him that she was presenting herself that day at the door of a certain cloistered Order in London. Her spiritual adviser approved, the Bishop himself thought she had the vocation. With the letter had come the cablegram from Lady Freke.

And here he was in response to it.

Horace found himself at the other side of the Gardens—in the Bayswater Road. Opposite him the big houses of Lancaster Gate rose like grey cliffs in an urban sunshine. Some taxis waited on a nearby cab-rank, and calling one, he asked the driver to let down the top, and was soon sliding toward his destination . . . *"En prince,"* he said to himself, removing his hat, partly for the pleasure of making this royal tour bareheaded, and partly because he believed sunlight good on somewhat sparse locks.

The last part of the journey was through wide but mean streets, and Horace, who would have had all life regulated "en prince" was glad to be done with them, to be dropped at the long, high wall, to be free to knock at the blank door.

A fat little lay sister let him in. He was Miss O'Brien's former guardian? Yes, he was expected. And if he would wait till after mass he should see her—Sister Mary of the Incarnation. Yes, the chapel was just there, on his left. There was also an entrance for the public, but few came.

Horace, who had a genius for making friends, learned that this was Sister Martina, a lay sister

only. Oh, yes, free to go into the world, not cloistered like the others. There were two of them, herself and Sister Theophila. They went every day to market—it was something to provide the food for all those blessed sisters—and Reverend Mother was a saint, but delicate. You had to be sure she got nourishing food, in spite of herself. And Sister Mary of the Incarnation? (who was to be—of course—they were all so sure of her piety they called her already by her name in religion) indeed, they all loved her. She had the certain makings of a good nun. You could tell it if a new sister had the vocation—she, Sister Martina, could.

Horace shook hands with her warmly, a little to her embarrassment, and passed into the chapel. It was just nine. Horace wondered if the sun had clouded over, or if it had turned cold, the chapel was so forbiddingly chill, so without colour or beauty. Mass was being said, and one or two old women knelt in a seat forward. There was, not far from them, a solitary youthful figure—that, in some surprise, he decided must be Daphne's. He had expected to see her in the veil of the novice, but Daphne—he knew her now, by the thick braids wound round the dark head—Daphne was in an ordinary black frock, with a knitted black shawl, like that of a peasant woman in Venice, around the slim shoulders, the merest shadow of a veil over her hair.

It would all have seemed intolerable had it not been for the sudden response of women's voices, coming sweetly from behind the tall arched grating

to the right, as you faced the altar. Horace's heart gave a little jump—was it the mystery of the thing, the beauty of the service, or some long silent reminder of his own Catholic youth? He knelt automatically, just as he had automatically made his genuflection upon entering the pew—and he remained kneeling, studying Daphne's pretty head, the fervour of her devotions, and the more distant figure of the priest, saying mass, and that of the small boy who was serving.

Suddenly he realised that the space was narrow, and one of Katty Freke's irreverences came into his mind: "A fat man in a tight pew can't be religious —he's a profane misfit." Horace was distinctly not fat, but he shifted quickly to his seat as he remembered Katty.

Leaning back, he contrasted this with the last mass he had heard—in the Argentine, in an old Spanish Mission, far inland, where the sun-baked mud walls kept out the heat, and the gaudily coloured windows let in the gold through rose and green and blue in patches on the hard-trodden earth floor. It had not been Sunday, not even a Feast Day, but some fifty or sixty figures came and went in the warm obscurity. Mostly brown-armed women in white chemises and coloured petticoats.

It was all right there—the Church was—it was stunning—but it needed the South, the warmth and colour of the Tropics. Here it was unrelieved greyness, with those two or three lonely black figures, and the decorations thin and poor. Daphne's little knitted shawl was a part of it, it meant the

cold, the sordid cheapness of this northern Catholicism.

Horace closed his eyes—to shut it out. Also, for he was a sybarite to sound as to sight, to listen the better to those feminine voices behind the grill. He pictured the nuns there, their lovely faces framed in the white bands, their clear eyes shining in the gloom or hidden as they prayed—in old pictures the saints raised their eyes in prayer. Did these modern saints look up or down? No, they were not so much saints as a flock of birds settling, crowded like birds, their plumage all alike, brushing one against the others.

He opened his own eyes to glance again at Daphne. Was it easier to think of her behind that cage, than still outside, in the clothes of the world? The little tinkle of the mass bell brought him once more to his knees. Curious how it took him back to his boyhood and the weekly attendance in that ugly little church on the Hudson!

Was he renegade to have dropped all that? Or was it the inevitable development of a wider life? To every man his mental pabulum, said Herbert Spencer—or something like that. Roman Catholicism had not provided his mental pabulum. Would it Daphne's?

His friend Tom McCarthy, though a Catholic, had had some un-Catholic points of view. "You're a holy Roman by temperament—nothing else," he used to declare. And that was only another way of stating the late Mr. Spencer's theory.

But Tom's way, or the great philosopher's way,

Horace had not found his mind's food there, and so had not remained a holy Roman. Would little Daphne?

Some time must have elapsed, for coming back to the actual scene, Horace beheld his ward, returned from the Communion he had been too abstracted to observe, slowly descending the two steps into the body of the church. It was the first time he had seen her face. She carried herself stiffly, rather like an up-to-date Fra Angelico angel, Horace smiled to himself, with her hands held somewhat awkwardly together, her head a little awkwardly on one side, her eyes down.

Often as Horace had seen the recipients of Holy Communion after the great moment, he had never realised a certain consciousness of attitude that must strike the outsider. It chilled him a little—he had often thought Daphne, when he had spared time to think of her at all—as difficult, disconcerting, but never as affected.

Just then she raised her eyes, looking straight at him, but not seeing him. They were blue eyes, green-blue, large and clear. And in them so pure a light, so mature a conviction, that Horace banished all idea of affectation in a flash. She turned quietly to the side opposite where he stood, and disappeared. The old women, snuffling a little, disappeared too—and Horace waited there like a man in a dream.

This developed, positive, beautiful personality, could this be little Daphne O'Brien?

He gazed at the door through which she had vanished. Something uncomfortable thumped at his side. It was a moment before he recognised his heart beats. His heart—the war-worn heart of forty-six! Beating like a boy's.

Someone must have been sitting behind him, for a figure rose from a few seats back, and came toward him. It was Lady Freke. He shook hands mechanically, still occupied with this astonishing problem of an enthralling Daphne, dimly conscious —the deuce!—of an enthralled Horace.

Lady Freke's knowing monocle brought him back to actuality. "You said 'the deuce!' My dear friend, that's no remark for this place."

"I didn't know I said it," replied Horace, pulling himself together. "I'll admit I thought it."

"Ah?"

"That charming young creature—she's knocked me silly."

"It was even money that she would," said the irreverent lady. "I'd like to think you'd knocked her sensible—got her out of this, in fact. Well, I'll give you every opportunity. Here's Sister Martina. Do we see Sister Mary of the Incarnation in the usual little room, Sister?"

Sister Martina nodded, and led the way up one broad flight of low stairs, to a long, bare, shining corridor, where she opened a door on her left. The room into which they were ushered was tiny, with one window facing the door, and between door and window another aperture, some three feet square, with a broad sill like a counter, and an iron grill,

instead of glass. Horace could see that this gave on to an even smaller room, also with door and window.

"I'm supposed to stay here with you," said his friend, "and I shall do nothing of the kind. You'll have more influence if you tackle her alone. And I've my morning paper, and shall read it outside here, so don't hurry."

Horace felt a gratitude out of proportion to the deed. He found himself holding Katty's hand as he stammered his thanks.

"Glory be!" Katty Freke said to herself, closing the door. "Horace Dimock's *beaux yeux* against the cloistered life!—No hope, of course, but I'll take a chance!"

Horace had hardly felt the door close when Daphne appeared noiselessly on the other side of the grill. She smiled quite naturally at him, all the exaltation of the chapel gone.

"Uncle Horace! How very nice of you to come! But where is Katty?"

"If she's Katty, I refuse to be 'Uncle Horace,' even to a holy nun," he heard himself saying, in his usual bantering fashion.

"Horace, how very kind of you to come," said Daphne, simply and affectionately. All the aloofness, all the self-confidence that had so displeased him in her childhood, seemed to have disappeared. She was almost benignant—and Horace remembered that Katty had said he would feel like a small boy.

"I suppose she'll come in a moment," Daphne went on. "She is my 'official family,' you know,

as you were away and Crystal had not arrived on this side. But won't you sit there—Horace—and we can talk a little?"

"I've talked to friends behind the bars before this, Daphne, but they were there against their will. You, I take it, could be free if you liked."

"I could never be so free in the world as I am here, Uncle Horace, I mean Horace. You won't perhaps believe me—but here—how can I express it? There is a freedom of the soul—and I don't mind the restrictions of the body."

"You have thought this out, very, very carefully?" said Horace, feeling like a fool as he said it.

Daphne's kind glance did not make him feel otherwise.

"You don't think I'd be going in for it if I hadn't studied the pros and cons?"

"But have you reflected that you could do a great deal outside, and that you'll do nothing here, except——"

"Except save my own soul? You're a Catholic, Uncle Horace; you know that the cloistered life has other objects than selfishly saving one's own soul."

"The cloistered life is all very well for girls who can do nothing else—but you could do—is there anything you couldn't do, Daphne?"

"You talk like my Protestant friends," smiled the girl. "And you know something better."

"But at least a practical, a working Order? I could reconcile myself to a life devoted to the poor or the sick—but this——"

"If I do feel the call to the contemplative life, don't you believe my prayers, even behind this grill, will be as tangibly for good as my nursing or teaching or going amongst the poor?"

Jove! How beautiful she was!

Horace tried for a lightness he did not feel. "I don't wish to play Devil's Advocate, my dear. It would only be canonising you the sooner. But look at me." (Horace knew he was good to look at.) "Is the world nothing, nothing, to you?"

Daphne looked at him as peacefully as one looks at a photograph.

"If it were nothing," she said, "where would my sacrifice be? And a sacrifice is all I have to bring when I enter here."

Horace had risen and, unknown to himself, was clenching the bars of the grill in rigid hands. Daphne looked with some wonder at the knuckles—so white, they seemed to stick out of the dark skin—it must be a fierce grip—and then up, for she was still seated, into the face above.

Who shall say what she saw there?

Horace was very pale, his black brows drawn together in a frown, his eyes so intent on her they seemed an entity apart, pursuing her.

The girl drew back a little, looking at him. "I'm sorry if it makes you angry. I didn't know you felt like that about it."

"It! You, not it. I'd break these bars to get you out if I could." (For a moment Daphne feared he could.) "It's a hideous mistake. Hideous. You were made for the world, Daphne, for the sunlight,

for the rest of us, for love. You'll never even know what love is now."

Daphne had risen, poised for flight, and looked at him over her shoulder, with wide blue-green eyes.

"You're wrong there, Horace," came her lovely undisturbed voice. "There's a possibility and expression of love here in this convent so far beyond anything outside, so far beyond any mortal love, that it is like the whole sky to a single cloud. And could I, in my right senses, go out into the world to secure that single cloud and leave the whole sky behind me? Never."

She slipped from the room as noiselessly as she had entered it. He saw the door close, and waited, staring stupidly at it for her to reappear.

"Damn!" he said at last, under his breath, realising that she would not come back.

When a man finds himself ridiculous, as Horace did now, he must either swear it, or laugh it, off. Horace chose finally to grin. What was he doing, old fox of forty-six, in this hennery? Anyway, what did he want with pullets, even the tenderest?

He opened the door and faced Lady Freke, smiling cynically at her.

"You drew a blank, Katty," he said at once.

"Mercy on us! The man's too intelligent," answered Lady Freke. "How did you know I was playing for big stakes?"

"I didn't know it then—I realise it only now. You were right—she's adorable. And she did make

me feel like a youthful guttersnipe. But she's in to stay."

They walked slowly down the stairs. Sister Martina, with some sewing in her hand, waited for them at the door.

"You've won out, Sister," said Lady Freke, ruefully, as she and Horace shook hands with the smiling little old woman. "I thought her guardian would persuade her she was wrong, but he's failed, like the rest of us."

"O my lady," said Sister Martina earnestly, "it would be wrong to interfere with a vocation. The Bishop himself says he may have been mistaken before, but with Sister Mary of the Incarnation he's certain. She *has* the vocation. Let me tell your ladyship something that happened the day you brought her. You left her with me, you remember —she wanted to come in quite alone. A poor little dog had come in at the same time, hungry, I suppose, and she leaned down just to pat him. But, 'Oh, I mustn't,' she said, and stood up."

"But surely," protested Katty.

"Oh, there was no reason—love of animals is not forbidden. Think of blessed St. Francis himself, loving all of them. No, it was just the feeling. She was giving up everything. She wanted to give up everything. O my lady, if ever anyone had the vocation, it's Sister Mary of the Incarnation."

Lady Freke's car awaited them in the sunny, silent street. Horace handed in his companion, but paused himself.

"I believe I'll walk," he said.

Katty looked at him. "Life's an extraordinary game, isn't it? Is someone moving us, or do we make our own moves? You'd better not walk, my friend. It's warm, and a long way."

"Take the line of least resistance, you mean? That's always wisdom." As he got in, and Katty had nodded to the chauffeur, she observed with a shrug,

"Say 'Damn,' if you like, Horace."

"I've said it," replied Horace.

CHAPTER V

THE POND HOUSE

"Bobby—Bobby—Bobbee—Bobobobobee!" came Mr. Honey's voice, in a persistent but unresentful wail.

Mr. Honey was eight. His name was Weelum Jawge, or what sounded like that, but at the Pond House he was known only as Mr. Honey. His friend and admirer, Bobby, sometimes felt that unexplained meanings lurked behind that appellation of "Mr. Honey" by the elders. But Bobby was five, and many things are still dark at five.

"Bobbee, Bobbee——" Mr. Honey's small, thin voice could now be located on the shaky paddock gate. The gate vibrated with Mr. Honey's insignificant weight, but it was a very old gate, perhaps two hundred and fifty years, like the house.

"Bobby!" came the firm voice of Bobby's sister Bedelia, older than Bobby by some four years. Bedelia was really Constance Isabel, "Bedelia," the affectionate bestowal of a light minded aunt, Lady Freke, in fact.

"Bobby McClinton, if you can't stop Mr. Honey from making that row, I'll 'sic' Finn McCoul on to him."

Bobby appeared reluctantly at the kitchen door,

his adorable small countenance smeared with the new gooseberry jam Mrs. Rumbold was making.

"Where are you, B'delia?" he enquired with an effort, for gooseberry jam, taken too enthusiastically, interferes with vocal expression.

Bedelia vouchsafed no response, but Finn McCoul barked shortly, and drew Bobby's guileless gaze upwards. There in the fork of the old apple tree was his sister reading, curled uncomfortably, with the irate fox terrier as uncomfortably scrabbled against her, only partially supported by the bough.

Bobby's gaze, drawn by the renewed "Bobbee—Bobbee!" wandered from the half hidden white figure in the thick leafage to the solitary grey one, outside the paddock gate.

"Oh! Weelum Jawge!" he called joyfully, "I'll be out in a minute—wiv somefin good!"

"Not afore ee gives back my spoon, Master Bobby," came Mrs. Rumbold's warning voice. "And I'll ask Mummer to forbid ee comin' into my kitchen, I will so—gooseberry time be no time for ee."

" 'Tisn't your kitchen," said Bobby stoutly. "It's our kitchen. And anyway, I'm goin' to ask Mummie if I can have some of ve jam for Mr. Honey."

"There ee go again. Whatever next, I says? Pain in stummick'll get ee, and yon *Mistah Honey!*"

But Bobby had dashed through the house to find his mother.

It was nearly noon, and Crystal, her hurried task of setting Pond House to rights quite finished, leaned back restfully in a long chair, under the rose trees.

The Pond House garden was an oasis of green shadow at the junction of the wide silvery pond and the sunny village street. It was shut in by a high mellow-coloured brick wall, with a lichen-grown coping of stone. The lawn close to the house was broken by two rose trees, whose branches had been trained into a canopy, a summer ceiling of yellowish roses and green leaves. Under this sat Crystal in her long chair, and here her small boy poured out his eager request.

"Jam for Mr. Honey, please, Mummie!"

"No. Mrs. Rumbold is like other artists, my son," came Crystal's tranquil voice. "You mustn't disturb her great work till it's done. But under the dresser you'll find some most attractive cakes, two for you, two for Bedelia, and three for Mr. Honey."

"You're a peach, Mummie!" said young America, departing gleefully.

Crystal smiled up at the rose canopy. What a delicious world it was! Opposite her the sun shone on the old white plastered house, softened by a gay pink rose that nearly covered it. The funny little pointed lattice over the entrance, heavy with honeysuckle, had on the one side a low square window looking into the hall; on the other, the long, open French windows of the drawing room. Above them two more squat windows told of the two country bedrooms, and above them again, the red-brown tiles of the old roof.

Inside, Crystal knew all these rooms, and those whose windows looked in other directions, to be spotlessly swept and garnished—roses everywhere;

the flowered bed and window curtains, and the tall glass carafes and jugs filled with clear water, making the upper rooms fresh and cool. Downstairs, the tiled floors newly done with red, clean custom of those Oxfordshire cottages. In the white living room, really a kitchen, other touches of dull red, the beauty of the blue and white dishes, the blue linen hangings stretched on the otherwise too staring walls, and the intense blue note of a friendly, solid biscuit jar in the middle of the white dresser. A delicious little house. Would Horace like it? Horace didn't care, really, for the simple life. He thought he did, and it was a part of Crystal's home building instinct to ensure that every comfort, every luxury, was ready at her friend's hand, yet without disturbing the general sense of country simplicity.

"A virtuous woman like Crystal deceives a man for his own good," often said her sister Katty; "a bad one for her own. And I, neither good nor bad, tell him the truth so openly he always believes me lying."

Crystal smiled again. If Katty meant all she said! 'Twould be what Mrs. Rumbold called "a pretty pickle, m'm."

And Katty would be down next day. How fortunate she hadn't put Horace off till the Wednesday, as she had been minded to! For now he would come this afternoon, there'd be all of twenty-four hours before little Katty arrived, Katty with her bright speculative eyes. Crystal pictured Horace's handsome, rather tired, head in the hammock opposite; Horace looking appreciatively toward the blue line

of the Chilterns beyond the shining pond that gave a name to Pond House; Horace beside her at the long table under the rose trees, when the country meal he loved was laid there and he found everything to his liking. Crystal disturbed the pleasant dream to wonder if the Gorgonzola would be just right. Horace was a bit fussy about his Gorgonzola.

The rest of the meal (Crystal knew her Mrs. Rumbold) would be perfect—the cream of green peas, the tuna bathed in mayonnaise on the freshest lettuce hearts; the smoking hot gammon, with new potatoes and their own grown spinach; and the tall green Capri bottle of white wine. Then that Gorgonzola and the hot pulled bread. Last, some enormous hot house white grapes from town. And coffee—not the Brazil or Central America Horace hated, but real Mocha—and his cigarette; Mrs. Rumbold and her niece Ada carrying the light table bodily away, the children safe abed, the late twilight lovely in the sheltered garden, and Horace settling down happily in his chair for the long talk that would follow.

If Crystal's vision touched on sweeter intimacies, she did not, being Crystal, allow it to linger there. Nor did any doubt of Horace obtrude. Had they not adored each other all these years? Were there ever letters like his, tenderest, frankest of all letters —and unfailing?

She did speculate a little wistfully on her own power to hold him, her extraordinarily attractive, clever, triumphant, courted Horace. Her own

beauty meant little to Crystal—she never counted on it, yet she had never, being Crystal, denied it was there. For what else had she with which to charm? She was not amusing like Katty, not young like Daphne, not bubbling with delicious inconsequences like Aileen Norton—but she had been painted and drawn and photographed too often not to realise that her type must be out of the common. And her children were too lovely not to have derived from at least one handsome parent. Whereas "Alexander McClinton," Katty had said agreeably, "was as handsome as a hat rack."

Crystal reproached herself for even remembering that caustic speech of Katty's. He had been so good to her, her Alexander, so erudite, so kind. He was past forty when they were married. She was only twenty—but during the five years before the first baby came—little Dorothea, who had died of croup—how wonderful he had been! How much he had taught her! And his will had been so generously, so nobly worded! "To my beloved wife, Crystal Howard McClinton, to mark my esteem for her fine character, and my acknowledgment of her devotion to myself, I hereby leave all the property of which I may die possessed, absolutely without restriction or reserve, knowing she will provide adequately for our children."

The Howard girls had been poor, and Crystal, with a passion for charity, had not been able till her widowhood to indulge what Katty termed the "dearest of her vices," that same eagerness to give.

And now the comfort of her life, the beautiful

house in Yonkers, the flat in London, this amusing cottage in Oxfordshire—all these were Alexander's gift. And Bedelia and Bobby! What undeserved treasures she had indeed received! And in return had given what? Her affection—a very tepid affection (she realised now) it must have been; and that beauty which meant nothing to her, but of which Alexander had been so proud. And now she had given that beauty to Horace. She could not even remain loyal to Alexander. She recalled Katty's theory that the truly loyal widow transfers her affection to a new recipient, as a token that wifely devotion had proved worth while. But Katty was Katty, and the standards by which she must be judged were not those for Crystal.

Her daughter's voice on the other side of the wall by the pond brought her back to the present. Finn McCoul was evidently being made to swim for his soul's sake. Crystal gave thanks mentally that it was not her little brother Miss McClinton was trying to improve. Bedelia was quite capable of ducking both Bobby and Mr. Honey when other entertainment failed.

It was time for the post to be in, and Crystal rose to go for it, and incidentally to pass the pond.

"Pardon, m'm," came Mrs. Rumbold's fruity voice, "but it *is* spinach for dinner?"

"Gammon and spinach," smiled Crystal (Horace would appreciate that old English combination).

"The gentlemen likes spinach." Mrs. Rumbold obviously approved. "I always says, m'm, if you'll

excuse the liberty, that be the true way to tell the gentry, by spinach. Common folk, they don't like it—too much trouble, spinach be, m'm. But your real gentlefolk, they all eats it—and what's better, I says—squeezed" (Mrs. Rumbold's eyes closed in ecstacy), "squeezed, and drop o' lemon juice, *and* cream. When I was cook to the Big House, his lordship did always say, give him Mrs. Rumbold and spinach, and other nations could eat angels—like that he said it, his lordship bein', you might say, affable."

"I'm sure Mr. Dimock will be proud to know he can pass the test," said her mistress.

Mrs. Rumbold turned blandly toward the kitchen garden to cut her spinach, and Crystal, protected by a parasol of apple green silk, like a beautiful green leaf in that golden sunshine, walked slowly out of her shady garden into the warm road. At the corner of the old wall she saw her little daughter's slim, straight figure on a stone, well out in the middle of the pond. Finn McCoul at a safe distance on the bank opposite was evidently declining to swim longer. Crystal smiled at the two, and child and dog promptly leaped to shore, to accompany her.

The village had but one street. "Do you know its name, Bedelia?"

"Yes, Mummie. 'Road whar be post office,'" said Bedelia, in an appalling Oxfordshire accent.

"And our lane is called 'Cheesefoot'—and you know the path across the fields to our other village? That's *Bittums.* 'Ar coom along, *Bittums,*' that's the way to say it, Mummie."

Crystal turned into "road whar be post office," charmed afresh with the settled peace and solidity of an English village. There were not more than a dozen houses in sight, but everyone had its tiny flower garden in front, and its thriving vegetable patch in the rear. A few fine elms gave frequent shady spaces. In the near distance the crooked road joined the highway. But even on the further side of that, as indeed on both sides of the village street, were the rolling fertile fields.

One of Farmer Giles' big lumbering wagons creaked down the road.

"It's the first mangel wurzels," shrieked Bedelia. "O Mummie, may I ride down to help Mo unload? It's Mo Garlick—a friend of mine!"

Mo Garlick grinned sheepishly as he touched his cap.

"If you'll be sure to come back at once," Crystal hesitated.

"Mo will bring me. Please, Mummie!"

"Ar be coomin' back for dinner," announced Mo, so Bedelia scrambled up, drawing Finn McCoul with her.

Crystal went on her way, smiling. Bedelia was a born farmer. And these farm hands, on the same soil immemorially, were as gentle and honest as their own Oxford country.

The post office was the fourth house on your right. When you opened the door, a bell should have rung to notify Miss Laminda, who was deaf. But Miss Laminda Sallum "didn't hold with no such shop ways," and you generally called "O Miss

Sallum!" or if you were friendly, "O Miss Laminda!" and the little old, old postmistress appeared. Farmer Giles swore his grandfather had courted her, which would make her close on to a hundred. But being, except for her deafness, as spry as a girl, this was hard to believe. Besides, she was almost coquettish with old Shepherd Gammon, who was only seventy-five, and had been heard to call her Laminda.

Her family was the oldest in the village, which was indeed called Sallum Prior—an old and probably once distinguished name. The other surnames in the neighbourhood were Honey, Garlick, Gammon, Woodly, and the like—all practical. But Miss Laminda Sallum had an old book in which one John Sallum figured as having written a poem to Queen Mary of sanguinary memory. And this inclined Miss Laminda to a softness of judgment where Roman Catholics were concerned, a softness not characteristic of the rest of the village. Added to this reason for tolerance, was the fact that she had once spent a week in London; and when she was a girl, six whole months in a neighbouring village. This gave her a travelled feeling, and in conjunction with her breadth of religious outlook, made her especially interested in the new American family who had taken Pond House—as something foreign, and not easily understood by the villagers.

When Crystal's tall white figure appeared in the tiny room that was both office and "settin' room," Miss Laminda entered at once. It was a warm afternoon, but the little knitted cap, with streamers, also

knitted, which she always wore, framed her little wrinkled rosy face. When Miss Laminda was feeling "fair bouncey" the cap was pink, but when she was "middlin," it was blue; or when things went wrong, when Mo Garlick didn't dig her potatoes, or she was tuppence short in her stamp accounts.

But it was pink today, and Crystal smiled down on her. When it was blue, you must look sympathetic.

The McClintons had been here not yet a week, but "Trust Crystal," Katty would say, "to know the first tooth and the last wish of every soul in the village in three days."

Miss Laminda began at once. "Fancy, Madame, Thyrza Gammon walked all the way over *'Bittums* to tell me you was all right. As if I didn't know it!"

"All right?" queried Crystal vaguely.

" 'Twas her notion. Not that Thyrza isn't a good kind soul. I knowed her grandmother, a good grandmother and mother she was, but notiony, too. Thyrza had the notion, as you was a-comin' here to live, she'd like to let me know it be all right, and be good for Sallum Prior."

"You mean I would be sure to pay my bills?" said Crystal in her distinct voice, smiling.

Miss Laminda deprecated the bluntness of this, but admitted that it was something like it.

"That was very kind of Thyrza Gammon," said Crystal, touched and pleased. "You see you really didn't know us, Miss Laminda, and Thyrza washed for us all last summer when we were in the other village."

"But Shepherd, as be Thyrza's father-in-law, Shepherd told us many a time about 'yon American lady'—bein' that pleased, beggin' your pardon, that 'twas fair easy to understand your talk, after the first. But Thyrza——"

"Isn't Thyrza a very busy woman?"

"All the Gammonses be busy. 'Twas so when I was young. 'Tis so now. There be a sayin' over *Bittums* to this day 'Godly as a Gammon'."

"Shepherd is the only one I really know," said Crystal, "and he is certainly one of the best."

"Ah, there do be not so many like Shepherd, you're right, Madame. The Gammonses be the salt of Oxfordshire. But like salt, they melts away, if so be you understands me. Time was when you'd not walk across *Bittums* without seein' a Gammon at work some'ere—but death has broke out in that family."

Miss Laminda paused and Crystal nearly kissed her.

"Dear Miss Laminda, you're wonderful. 'Death has broke out in that family!'"

The little postmistress heard only the "dear Miss Laminda." "Thank ee, mum. Is it stamps or post cards?"

"Post cards, please, a shilling packet. And my letters, if the post is in."

"It be a great thing for Sallum Prior;" approved Miss Laminda, sorting them out. "A heap o' letters like yon," and having handed over letters and papers, accompanied her visitor to the door to hold it open for her.

Crystal walked slowly back to the Pond House, in her clear green silk shadow. Not a soul seemed to be abroad, and she pictured the villagers at their midday meal, in the various little houses. Here was Munday's, running over with children. Next door poor pathetic Elizabeth Woodly, with one drunken son, and one who was in the constabulary and a comfort to her. The corner house was occupied by old Miss Fitches and her two bachelor brothers. All these men before the war had made only sixteen shillings a week, if indeed, they made more than fourteen. She had heard of but one who got eighteen, a gardener, at the Big House. What did they do on that meagre pittance? What did they do now even on the thirty shillings she heard they got? Thirty shillings wasn't even seven dollars a week.

What were they all having for dinner? What could they do on seven dollars for a family like the Mundays for instance . . . five small children and the old sister who lived with them? In the old days, yes. Tea had been a shilling a pound, now it was two shillings. Bread had been, as everywhere in England, less than a third what it was at home. Even now it did not cost half what Americans paid. And the little vegetable patches played a large part. There were no better potatoes anywhere than Oxfordshire potatoes . . . milk of course was dear . . . for Oxfordshire . . . and it used to cost only two pence, four cents! a quart! She wondered about meat. Every family she knew had it on Sunday, at any rate. On other days, kippers . . .

even those had increased from a penny apiece to three pence. Eggs that in pre-war days had been in certain months eighteen a shilling were now three a shilling. . . .

But it all remained a miracle. How did they manage?

Her own meal, which was the children's and the servants' dinner, already laid outside under the rose canopy, looked selfishly abundant. Pretty Ada and Ivy, the one, housemaid, the other, nursemaid, were putting the last touches to the table and giggling as they did so.

"Where are the children?" asked Crystal.

"Please, m'm, Master Bobby ee won't come down. Says ee's a tree toad." Fresh giggles, and a superior snort from the tree above made Crystal look up. There roosted her only son, and his friend Mr. Honey.

"Come down, Bobby," said his mother. "You'll be late, and you know it's a penny fine."

"But I must ask somefin' partic'lar, Mummie," came the stage whisper, "if Ada and Ivy will go away."

The little maids fled, still giggling, and Bobby, in hoarse accents, as one to be heard only by a special listener, asked if Mr. Honey might stay for luncheon?

"It's dinner, weally," he explained to Mr. Honey, who was acting up to the assigned rôle of not hearing the request, and who now twisted awkwardly on his uncertain seat.

"Yes," said Crystal, "I really prefer it today." (There was a compact by which Mr. Honey's invitations were limited to one in three days). "But you'll have to hurry, for if you're both late you'll have to pay Mr. Honey's fine too."

"Hooway!" came Bobby's cheerful voice, as his fat legs could be seen scrambling down the tree, and he and Mr. Honey dashed around a corner of the house toward "Washing up" quarters. Bedelia appeared at the same moment, and taking in the situation, announced that if Bobby was to have Mr. Honey out of turn for a meal, it was only fair for her to have Finn McCoul.

Her mother peacefully agreed, except for the reminder that there'd be a penny fine if she wasn't back in two minutes, and Miss McClinton and the joyful Finn McCoul scuttled down the path after the small boys.

Mrs. Rumbold herself always brought in the soup with much ceremony, while Ada and Ivy demurely held the chairs ready. Mrs. Rumbold did not approve of the villagers' sharing in so important a function as a meal prepared by herself for "the fam'ly," but only added dignity signified her disapproval.

The children and the fox terrier appeared just as the soup was set firmly on the table. Bobby, who was punctilious to a degree, explained that while Mr. Honey ought by rights to sit next Mummie, he would perhaps have a better view of what was coming if he sat beyond him, Bobby.

"You mean that Mummie won't care to hear Mr.

Honey sloop his soup," came tartly from Miss McClinton, who was assisting Finn McCoul into the chair next hers.

"Mummie!" protested Bobby, in horrified tones.

"You *do* sloop, don't you, Mr. Honey?" enquired Bedelia moderately.

"Yeh," said Mr. Honey, whose conversation was limited.

"But Finn McCoul is sloopier, isn't he, Weelum Jawge?" asked Bobby eagerly.

"Yeh," said Mr. Honey again.

"Mummie, which would you ruvver listen to, Finn McCoul or Mr. Honey?"

"At real luncheon parties," said his mother, judicially, "one doesn't talk of physical difficulties."

"You see, B'delia, Mummie means it's wude. Doesn't she, Weelum Jawge?"

"Yeh," said Mr. Honey.

Fortunately the soup had now been passed to all, including Finn McCoul. Mrs. Rumbold majestically withdrew, and even Bedelia was too hungry to observe the ecstatic anguish of Mr. Honey as he wrestled with his meal.

Crystal herself sat through the lively half-hour as one many miles away. All this was but a prelude—the true theme to follow.

"This green garden, this lovely silence," she said to herself, walking away when the children were busy with their pudding, and Bedelia, softened perhaps by repletion, was telling the others an absorbing story of wild animals and a poor plough boy.

"This green garden, this lovely silence,
These shady places made for love and you,
I shall remember, I shall remember,
As all that Life has proven fair and true."

Horace had written that for her, and having a nice sense of not too serious music, had set it to a pretty air. She had often played and sung it to herself softly—and now it ran delightfully through her mind. She passed under the dark cool shadow of the cypress grove that divided the garden from the orchard, and so out into the sun and sweetness of the apple trees.

"This green garden, this lovely silence,
And shining on my heart your tender eyes,
I shall remember, I shall remember
Across the seas and under other skies."

She wished that she had not at the same moment recalled an unkind criticism in a flippant New York paper (for of course Horace had allowed this, and some other verses, to be published);

"We would advise the author to put some of the energy of his 'remembering' into forgetting his ambition to write poetry."

That other green garden was her more pretentious one in Yonkers—whither Horace had followed her the year after that summer in Wicklow. Poor Alpha was still alive, although they had been divorced in 1912, months before the wonderful Wicklow days. It was Alpha that Horace meant of course, when he went on,

"This green garden, this lovely silence,
My shelter might it ever, ever be! . . .
But I alas, I must remember
The cruel ghost that still will follow me."

Crystal, kindest of women, was capable of real anger against Alpha that she had caused Horace such suffering. His first plea to herself had been to help him forget his unhappy married life, to convince him that all women were not hard and intolerant. Crystal had been a little shocked by this love making so soon after her Alexander's demise, and with Horace's wife still living, although they were divorced. But that was all swept away in the high tide of the wonderful devotion offered her. She was then thirty-six, and although she did not know it, hungry for love. Horace knew it—his understanding of women, he had told her, was psychologically sound. Crystal had not asked him, as Katty would have done in her place, how many women he had made a study of, to have acquired this wisdom.

"O green garden, O lovely silence,
When I am far beyond your leafy span,
Let me remember, let me remember,
That once walked here a blithe contented man."

That was what she had done for him, she and her green garden, in exchange for the astounding gift of love. She had made him a "blithe contented man"—that restless moody Horace. Was it a wonder, with his enormous responsibilities, his lack of a settled home, that he should be moody?

And now—Crystal looked over the jasmine covered wall to the Chilterns—over the warm Oxfordshire fields—now all that restlessness and moodiness would end. He should have a real home at last. They would let the world know their secret; the children would be so much the better for a man in the house. She didn't know whether Horace really cared much for children, but Bedelia and Bobby should never bother him. Her mind touched on the practical difficulties in the way, but glanced off happily again. Nothing was impossible in the face of a great love like theirs.

"O green garden, O lovely silence," sang Crystal happily, looking from the end of the long box-bordered centre path in the old orchard. The roofs of house, out-houses, stable and summer kitchen grouped, like a little village in themselves, at the other side of the garden. Over them the tall trees, beyond them the June sky. Near her feet everything green and growing and blossoming. Everywhere the ancient plum and apple trees, laden with fruit, still unripe, but thickly clustered—a little Earthly Paradise, Crystal thought; humbly, profoundly grateful for the beauty without, and the happiness within.

CHAPTER VI

HORACE'S ARRIVAL

As Crystal, all fresh white to her shoes, and sheltered by the apple green parasol, turned out of "Cheesefoot," the Pond House lane, into the High Road for her walk to the market town where she was to meet Horace on the early afternoon train, she became aware of some excitement behind the elder bushes. On her right, near the corner was Selwood's pig yard, screened from the road by the tall elders, and fortunately not odorous except when the wind blew from the north.

Against the fence of the pig yard leaned Mr. Honey wearily, as one to whom pigs were an ancient story. Mary Meteyard, who lived with Miss Laminda, and was quite as aged, if not so active, had paused on her way to the farm to chuckle at the entertainment. Bedelia, obviously in charge, was perched on one tall gate post, brandishing a long stripped stick from the elder tree. Finn McCoul maintained a perilous footing on the other post.

"Hi, Bobby, go it, old sport! Wake up, Daffodil! Get a move on, you two! Good old Bobby!" and much more in Miss McClinton's vibrant tones.

In the ring, so to speak . . . more literally, in the mud, the thick black oozy mud of a happy pigsty,

Crystal beheld her youngest on the unattractive back of a large indignant sow.

"Good old bacon!" shrilled Bobby's vociferous encouragement, as, with another elder branch, he prodded his steed forward.

"Get up, Daffodil, get up I say! Make her get up, B'delia!"

Bedelia, in response, leaned forward as the rider came near, launched a stinging whack at Daffodil's hind quarters, and, over balancing, fell plump into the unspeakable mire. The surprise was too much for Bobby, who appeared to shoot violently from Daffodil's back into a sitting position by the mud-covered Bedelia, and for Finn McCoul, who leaped down, barking violently.

"A sight for any mother!" said Crystal, trying not to laugh, as, holding her white skirts carefully from the fence, she looked down into the smudged countenances of her young.

"Mummie! *Did* you see the circus?" enquired Bedelia, uncomfortable but rapturous. "Quiet, Finn McCoul!"

"I certainly did. And I now see the dirtiest little clowns of my experience. Mr. Honey, will you run up to the Pond House and ask Ivy and Ada to come here at once?"

"Yeh!" said Mr. Honey, disappearing.

"And the two of you—I can't call you children—you mud chickens, climb over the fence very carefully, and don't shake any mud on to Mrs. Meteyard, or your parent. Leave Finn McCoul there until I get away."

"Good-bye for today, Daffodil!" said Bedelia, cheerfully, drawing herself out of the wallow.

"Good-bye, old bacon!" added Bobby. "Mummie, isn't Daffodil a sweet name? B'delia named it to her."

"I wish it were all as sweet as the name," said his mother, holding a handkerchief to her nose. "Didn't your programme disturb the little Daffodils?"

The little Daffodils appeared to number nine as they could be observed struggling for their mother's attention.

"Only one is Daffodil," Bedelia found time to say, as she wiped her dripping hands on the one clean place left to her frock. "We're going to name them all after flowers—all Daffodil's children."

"My own daffodils seem to need a mother too," reflected Crystal, "but they must put up with Ada and Ivy. Careful, there!" withdrawing hastily to the other side of the road, followed by Mary Meteyard, as the mud covered angels swarmed over the fence. "The rural life is all very well, but I am on my way to meet Uncle Horace—and must keep my pretty frock clean."

"Oh, Mummie, may we go with you?" shrieked both angels in unison.

"You may not!" returned Mummie, firmly. "And here are the little maids. Ada, dash home and put out two tubs in the wash house. See that there is plenty of hot water, and bring down half a dozen old towels." Ada sped away.

"Ivy," Mrs. McClinton continued, "you go home

with the children. Make sure they do not touch anything or anybody on the way, and get them into the tubs as soon as you can. Afterwards, throw all their clothes, even their shoes, into clean water."

"Yes, m'm," said Ivy piously, but as the lively if deplorable procession moved off, was heard to enquire of the encrusted Bobby "if so be ee war a tree toad now or whatever?"

Mary Meteyard had gone on toward the farm, chuckling, but Mr. Honey still lingered.

"There is no limit to the ingenuity of the infant mind, is there, Mr. Honey?"

"Yeh," said Mr. Honey.

"You don't agree? Well, suppose then, when I am out of sight, you open the gate for Finn McCoul, go up to the Pond House and stay in the front, you understand, not anywhere near the washhouse. You'll find a book of Bobby's on the long chair."

"Yeh," said Mr. Honey, taking off his hat with painful care, as Bobby had advised in dealings with Mummie.

"Good-bye, then. Remember! And Mr. Honey, if you do exactly as I ask, you may stay to tea with Bobby."

"Yeh!" said Mr. Honey, almost smiling, and Crystal departed.

The road to the station ran parallel to the Chilterns, with broad rolling acres in between. Sallum Prior was one of a hundred such villages—a few old houses, a church, probably a manor—"the Big House." You could pass a dozen larger than Sallum and never see them from the High Road.

Miles to the west lay Oxford; half as many to the south, the silvery Thames. And always to the east the blue Chiltern Hills.

Oxfordshire is eternally lovely. To those with a special affection for that county, it seems lovelier than the others. To an American it is, more than any other, the heart of England. The people in the less known villages have perhaps changed little since Elizabethan days. Crystal thought of old Shepherd Gammon, who could neither read nor write, yet who presented so forcibly, so downright a personality, that she liked to think him the unaltered English type that had lived in those midlands when Shakespeare did.

To the American eye, fresh from the overcrowded sensation New York, even Connecticut, and the other Eastern states must give, these unoccupied spaces between the Oxfordshire villages—the endless succession of fields, under cultivation or lying fallow—the always uninterrupted marvellous distances—all these are astonishing. Why should we, practically an empty country in comparison with overpeopled England, why should we never escape the vigilant and usually unbeautiful regard of the endlessly repeated house by the roadside? In England, houses *cluster*—in America they *straggle*—they never come to an end—till indeed you reach the prairie.

The road from Sallum Prior passed only one house after it left the farm which marked the end of the village. Reaching the top of Chaff Hill, highest point on the road, Crystal stood a moment

to look all ways over the midsummer landscape. Behind her Sallum Prior was hidden under its giant trees. On both sides of the road, unending fields of grain and hay—still green, though where the hay was cut, the little cocks looked like yellow cushions on a green floor. Always the blue Chilterns, always the stately elms!

Walking on, she soon had her dear afternoon picture of the market town, in the golden sunshine—red brown roofs under dark green trees. The Chilterns came to an end here, and the background of the little town was softly rolling country, green, mauve and yellow meadows. Across that country Horace's train was bringing him ever nearer. The Dimocks, Dymoke, wasn't it? came from the south-west of England, she had heard him say—not like her forbears, from midland towns, so he would not have the feeling for Oxfordshire that she had. When she had arrived the year before in the other village, at the edge of Chalgrove Field, had passed that monument to Hampden, so near where he had fallen, great man and patriot! all her Puritan blood had danced in her veins. Katty said her Irish blood did that when they walked by the Blackwater in Kerry—how was that possible when the Irish strain in them was so remote, so tiny in comparison with that fierce Puritanism that had first taken them as a family to America?

She had reached the little town now, and walked contentedly under the tall trees past the old squat houses. At the *Royal George,* under the covered

primitive carriage way, she found "Dicky the Driver" washing the wheels of the ancient fly.

"Will you harness up, Dicky, and follow me to the station? I am expecting a friend, and would like the fly to take us out to the Pond House."

Dicky the Driver grinned a cheery assent and touched his forelock. "Ar'll be coomin' afor ever you reaches station, m'm."

There was only one fly in the town. To be sure, there was the "trap," and a decayed dogcart; and a lumbering bus met most of the trains—but the fly, if old, was comfortable, and Crystal half hoped the rumour of a rival motor service to be established was rumour only. She reflected whimsically, as she left the *Royal George* to walk toward the station, that what would not be tolerated a moment in the smallest town in America, was here not only tolerated, by those same Americans who would have made a fuss at home, but kept and cherished.

Crystal walked out of the town, and toward the station.

When you left a town in Oxfordshire, you left it. The station in this particular town had been placed a half mile from the last house, and you walked at once and a long way between fields and orchards. Dicky overtook her just as she turned in at the station yard, a transformed Dicky, with his hat rakishly askew and a large red flower in his buttonhole. The funny little branch train drew in almost as soon, and Crystal saw Horace's dark blue figure and straw hat as he stepped eagerly to the platform.

They had not seen each other for two years, and,

as always after absence, there is, even between intimates, a curious sense of strangeness, so now Crystal felt infinitely far away. They shook hands, mindful of observation, and she felt her friend's appreciative but critical eyes studying her face.

"Be yon all the luggage, m'm?" came from a beaming Dicky the Driver, as he took Horace's bag, and Crystal asked what other things Mr. Dimock had, in that coldly polite voice one uses on such occasions, and translated his "One trunk, one suit-case, one hat box, all with my initial," into "One box, Dicky, and two small pieces, all marked with a D," and led the way to the ancient fly.

She was quite as tall as her companion, and although this vexed him a little as it always had, he noted with the old pleasure her quiet easy walk, the lovely profile, the unaltered rosy colour in the pure line of the cheek. He liked her being always in white, approved the gracious curves of the big white hat, shading the grey eyes, smiled at the brown tendrils of soft hair, and at the long fine neck.

Dicky the Driver soon had the luggage piled beside him on the fly, and Horace, who had been waiting at the open door looking in at his handsome friend, drew a long breath of pleasure as he also entered.

"Jove, it's a stunning place to come to, your Oxfordshire!" and in a lower tone, "How soon may I kiss you?"

The quick colour suffused Crystal's face. "Not for hours," she smiled back. "You are now the observed of Oxfordshire, and must live up to it."

He had his hand on hers under her lacy scarf. "It's like a flower," he said, "after you've been holding a stick or a pump handle. I've been holding pump handles for two years, Crystal, and now to come home to you! It make a man feel pretty small to think all this is for him!"

"Poor boy—you deserve something. What a hard two years it has been!"

"Don't speak of it—your letters were all that made it bearable. But it's been a huge success, *Bovo* has. You're riding with one of 'our most distinguished citizens,' Madame!"

"In this unworthy fly, too!" laughed Crystal. "You came earlier than you planned?"

"Yes, awkwardly so," and he heard himself telling Crystal how very awkward it had been to leave when he did; and just as he had foreseen, she said:

"Oh, I *am* sorry, Horace!" but she added, "It was partly for poor little Daphne, wasn't it?"

Horace hoped his voice was as unconcerned as he meant to make it. "Partly. But unavailingly. She sticks to her resolution—little goose!" he managed to say carelessly.

"There's something very fine in it, all the same, Horace."

"Oh, yes, it's a singleness of purpose one doesn't look for in the modern complicated type of girl."

"One questions the economy," mused Crystal, "in a case like Daphne's. Of course to anyone who knows her capabilities it seems an appalling waste."

"Why do we talk of anything but this ideal day?" protested Horace, "and of this old English village?"

"Village! Our market town, if you please. See the old Town Hall? A little apology for one, but rather fine, isn't it? And look down our main street. Was ever anything dearer?"

"Only one thing," said the warm voice in her ear, for the movement to show him the main street had brought her closer to him, and if it had not been for her wide hat, he could have kissed the soft hair.

"Be good, Horace, *please*. We are now passing old Miss Pennycuick's. She sits all day in that upper window, where she can see you perfectly."

If she abjured him to be good, she was nevertheless a little chilled that he acted on the adjuration so obediently. Was there some reserve behind his obedience, some withdrawal she only vaguely realised?

Crystal did not let herself think so. She pointed out the fine old church, with the narrow stream of clear water that ran along the churchyard wall. Then the humpy little house where Mary Anna Barkuss lived, Mary Anna was close on to ninety-seven.

"We live to a great age in Oxfordshire," she said. "Half of our own village have passed seventy, and at least five of us are long over ninety."

They were out of the little town now, and Horace could study his companion's face openly.

"You're as beautiful as I've remembered you, Crystal," he said. He did not say that the first tiny wrinkles he had ever observed in her face could be seen near her eyes when she laughed, but she realised his scrutiny. His own face, in the trying

South American atmosphere, had aged perceptibly. And Crystal admitted frankly to herself, that she could see it, and liked it all the better. But as Katty had often said, "A woman loves a man because of his drawbacks. A man loves a woman in spite of hers."

"You saw Katty?" she said, when this passed through her mind.

"Yes, and I had to evade her to come down alone today. She's splendid, Katty is, more amusing than ever, but I didn't wish to make the trip 'en famille'. She has a fresh bee in her bonnet, by the way, did you know?"

"Not the Irish one? That's always buzzing."

"No, a Serbian one. She has two extraordinarily attractive men in tow—officers, I believe, altho' I saw them only in mufti. I didn't in the least know what their nationality was. Serbian, by George! Have you seen them?"

"No. I've seen but one Serbian, a Mr. Mirko Collovich whom I met once at dinner. But he might have been of any nationality. Just a delightful man of the world, with an American wife."

"These two were types apart," answered Horace. "One couldn't associate them with anything one knew."

"Katty tells me," Crystal went on, "indeed she's been telling me for two years, that the Serb is your real superman. And no one has dreamed it."

"We certainly haven't in the Argentine. Serbians! It's a revelation. You must see them."

"I shall probably see them in time," replied Crystal. "Katty always shares her stars with me."

"She collects stars as other people do pets. Well, we're all animals to your sister, I suppose. I take it that ménage, the Cadogan Square one, is still serene?"

"Why, of course; didn't it seem all right?" queried Crystal in surprise. (Horace almost seemed to wish it didn't).

"Oh, right as rain. But hasn't Freke been away a lot?"

"All through the war," said Crystal. "In almost inaccessible regions. But she's very happy to have her boys with him. They are amusingly congenial, funny shy old Blundell and those lively boys."

"How are they turning out, Katty's boys?"

"Horace, they're darlings! Katty's always said her children were nice to spite us all . . . for she was very casual in the way she brought them up. We all thought they would be hopelessly spoilt and incapable."

"I can't think of any child of Katty's, not to speak of Merton Hazelby White's, as incapable."

"Well, my little sister was extraordinarily unlike other mothers. She always declared that neglect was better for any child than the best of care. And these two were certainly neglected, according to conventional standards. But they've turned out marvels!'

"Good-looking, of course?"

"Yes," considered Crystal. "You remember what their father was called? 'The handsomest

man in the state of New York.' The boys are both like him, and like each other, yet unlike."

"What are they in feeling, English?"

"Mercy, no!" laughed Crystal. "They are the most genuinely American creatures ever known. They've been flying, as you know, first in the English service; but as soon as we entered the war, they transferred to the American. But there or here, they've both been, since they were babies, for America first, last, and all the time."

However, Horace had had enough of Katty's boys. "How are your own attractive young?" he asked.

"Blooming. I hope you'll like them, Horace. I've taken a leaf out of Katty's book. I try not to worry so much about them."

"I shall rejoice if that means I'll see more of you and . . . "

"And less of them?" smiled Crystal. "It will. These are Elysian fields for kiddies . . . so safe and yet so free. They may do anything . . . almost anything, they like here."

She did not tell him what they had done to Daffodil. There was always a good deal you didn't tell Horace, particularly about children.

"You mustn't mind if we're not so orderly as we shall be," she warned him. "You know we arrived only Thursday, came up this same way, with Dicky the Driver, not knowing in the least what the Pond House would be like. Of course we'd been all over this country . . . our little place during the war was over there to the right, by way of *Bittums*. But

the Pond House was so deliciously shut in, this village so retired, we never, in all our excursions about here, even suspected its existence."

"Am I not to see your other village? Your accounts of it last year were pretty fine reading, my dear."

"You're too kind to my letters." Crystal was pleased, as always. "Yes. If you like we'll walk over there after tea. Old Shepherd Gammon is ill, and we'll go to enquire for him."

Horace knew all about Shepherd. Indeed, there was little in this section of Oxfordshire he didn't know about, from her letters. And part of Horace's charm was his ardent appreciation. You could count on it, whether it was for the beautiful, the amusing, or the curious . . . for types as far apart as Shepherd Gammon and Peter Norton. "Horace the Epicurean," Tom McCarthy had called him.

As they turned out of the main road into Cheesefoot lane, he was delighted with the two or three tiled roofs, the enormous elms that dwarfed the cottages, and the ample fields into which the tiny village melted. Some low out-houses and a long wall Crystal pointed out as the beginning of her own domain; and two immaculate shouting white figures and a silent grey one hailed their arrival from the paddock gate.

The white figures disappeared, and Horace had time to hand Crystal out, and to have his first look at the embowered, yes, that was the word, the delightfully embowered old place, before they dashed around the corner to hurl themselves upon him.

"Uncle Horace! Isn't Pond House nice? Did you see Daffodil? and" (this from Bobby) "where is Mr. Honey? Weelum Jawge, come here. Don't forget, you know what, Weelum Jawge!"

Mr. Honey removed his cap as previously arranged with Bobby, and looked into it anxiously.

"Oh, this is Mr. Honey?" Horace shook hands as seriously as even Bobby required. Mr. Honey said "Yeh," and dropped the cap.

Bedelia regarded the returned uncle with an unwavering gaze. She seemed to remember that on previous visits this rather overwhelming person had taken more of Mummie's time than was desirable. But Bedelia was now nine, and liked the grown up courtesy with which Uncle Horace said,

"That's a very nice frock, Bedelia, and what an excellent dog!"

"Pure bred," said Miss McClinton briefly. "To make up for leaving America."

"I see he has no collar. May I present one with 'Bedelia McClinton, her dog, The Pond House' on it?"

The austere Bedelia smiled, and the younger McClinton announced promptly.

"What I need is a mud guard!"

"Shame, Bobby, that's hinting for a present," said scandalised nine years old.

"It's not, it's for a bicycle," retorted five years, nearly in tears. "It's ve English for fender."

Uncle Horace was agreeably alert in his remark that a mud guard could be as easily procured as a

dog collar, and Bobby, much relieved, brought Mr. Honey to this delightful relative's notice.

"Weelum Jawge would like a knife," he said.

"Mummie!" remonstrated Bedelia. "Why do you *let* him go on asking for things?"

But Mummie opined that Uncle Horace was quite capable of protecting himself, even from Bobby, and the knife was promised to Mr. Honey.

After this, Bobby, as the man of the house, escorted Uncle Horace to his room, one of those overlooking the garden and the pond; better still, the meadows and the blue Chiltern Hills.

"It's ve best guest room," Bobby remarked reflectively. "And if you look past Fitches, you can see ve Icknield Way."

"Thank you, Bobby, I've come more than half around the world to see that Icknield Way and all that's near it."

"Do ve people where you live have mud guards, Uncle Horace?" pursued Bobby, with an innocence that would have infuriated Bedelia, had she been there.

Horace laughed, and put the small boy almost tenderly out of the room. "I won't forget the mud guard," he promised, "nor Mr. Honey's knife," and Bobby went importantly downstairs.

Tea was served in the orchard, where a low platform had been built around a century-old apple tree, so that you could look across the quaint kitchen garden, beyond the evening fields, to that Icknield Way Bobby had shown Horace.

"Is there any corner about Pond House that is

not exquisite?" asked the really enraptured guest. "It's what one dreams of—this old little house and old big garden." And to himself he said that Crystal herself was as tranquil and exquisite as her garden. And Crystal, knowing what he thought, reassured herself that this was what she had dreamed of too—the safe return of her beloved, the loveliness of their environment, his obvious content—and yet, and yet—

As soon as tea was over, Crystal proposed the walk across *Bittums* to see old Shepherd. Yes, she went every evening, it was all she could do for him. Was she restless? Horace asked himself.

The walk was part of a perfect day. *Bittums* was a foot path only, and most of the time Horace kept just behind his guide, watching her lovely head against the sunset, or against the clump of fine old oaks on the brow of the hill. It was all too short a way over to Shepherd's thatched cottage.

The old man sat by a smouldering fire, despite the summer weather, on what Horace could see was the mate to the long chair in Crystal's garden,—his poor swathed leg comfortably supported. A fine old type, as Crystal had described him, long, gaunt, with rugged features, a colour still fresh, a keen eye.

The cottage consisted of but two rooms, one above the other, with a narrow stair, like a ladder. How did the poor old boy ever mount it? Horace wondered. The door and one little leaded window opened west, on to Shepherd's own vegetable patch and toward the neighbouring pasture lands. The

east window, also small and leaded, looked to the village, and over old Eliza Woodworth's cabbages.

"Allus summat to look on," said Shepherd. "No call for mopin,' I says. Cabbages be rare growin'. But her" (with a twinkle toward Crystal) "her doesn't hold wi' cabbages."

"I feel properly apologetic," laughed Crystal. "Shepherd can't forgive me for not letting him plant all Pond House in cabbages."

"Yearth be made for cabbages," maintained the old man, sententiously, "but her do like taters."

"And that redeems her?" Horace asked. A wise grunt was the reply.

"Shepherd had my whole place planted and growing before ever we saw it," Crystal explained. "He made that long journey every day, to be sure I'd find it all ready. And now Mr. Dimock is to eat some of your new potatoes this evening, Shepherd, and your beautiful spinach."

"Spinach be well enough," mumbled Shepherd, "if so be can't get cabbage," but in a louder tone, "Thankee for baccy, m'm. It coom this arternoon. Her sends me my baccy, her do," he offered to Horace. "Best plug as coom from London, so make two ends meet, ar do."

"Tell Mr. Dimock, Shepherd, just how you do make them meet. He'll never believe it."

"Ar gets seven shillun sixpence a week, from gov'ment; every week ar gets it. Old Age Pension it be. Out'n it one'n fourpence rent."

"Not thirty-two cents a week for this delicious cottage," interpolated Crystal.

"Five shillun to Thyrza for my dinner, and a-keepin' all proper, leaves one an' two for extries—tea an' sugar an' a bit o' bread."

"One and two—a shilling and two pence, not twenty-eight cents," thus Crystal again, "for his breakfast and tea."

"But what about clothes?" marvelled Horace.

"O when so be ar need trousies, ar digs taters for her yonder!" and the old fellow chuckled at Crystal.

"Or he makes me have more cabbages," said Crystal, rising. "Thank you, Shepherd. And good-bye for this time. Mr. Dimock will know where to come when he's down to seven and six a week.

"May I not send some—er—some South American tobacco?" said Horace.

"Nothin' no better, nowhere, nor hers," answered Shepherd uncompromisingly.

"Instead of manufacturing tobacco so gratuitously," Mrs. McClinton suggested, "why not send Shepherd something already made? I mean *Bovo.*"

"Of course, the very thing. I'll send him a case," agreed Horace, with genuine pleasure.

They walked home rather silently. To be seventy-five; to be ill and alone; to live on a few shillings a week—yet to be contented——

"Godly as a Gammon," came into Crystal's mind—and she laughed.

"Oh, Horace! when I think of what I have, and yet what trifles I allow to disturb me—I am indeed ashamed."

"Then there is a trifle, my dearest?" But Horace did not press for it. And *was* she his dearest?

The dinner Crystal had so carefully planned was a triumph for the gratified Mrs. Rumbold. Even the Gorgonzola was perfect. It was nearly ten when they finished, and the light table having been removed, Horace leaned back in the long chair smoking. . . . When Crystal sat on a stool beside him,—with her head—it was a very deep shadow, that under the rose arbour!—against his shoulder, it seemed to him that all his happiness was there—unaffected by that disturbing experience in the convent.

A beautiful night—a beautiful woman who adores you—the quiet of country solitude—those tiresome children long asleep—the servants at the back of the house, Mrs. Rumbold undoubtedly preparing that very moment to go majestically home, to her son, Mo. Mo was probably snoring already. The little maids would tiptoe up to their room directly, with a guttering candle——

Horace savoured every moment of it. The fragrance of the rose overhead was like a garden incense. The frogs croaked in the pond on the other side of the wall. Little murmurs ran through the trees. Above them, the illimitable dark blue of the June night. . . .

Was it not for this he had come across the world?

He felt Crystal stiffen suddenly as she sat away from him. He had not heard a sound, but there before them, arriving so noiselessly she might have

dropped from the air, and close enough to show her big eyes, stood Bedelia, in her little nightgown.

"Darling! What's wrong?" said Crystal breathlessly.

"Bobby. I think he's going to die," said Miss McClinton. "I want to go back to America."

Crystal was on her feet, and before the child had finished, inside the house. They heard her run lightly up the stairs.

"What's the matter, really?" enquired Horace. "Are you dreaming, Bedelia?"

"No, Uncle Horace. Poor little Bobby is being sick—in English, not American, you know. Ivy says he 'sicked' all over the carpet. Ivy shut the doors so Mummie wouldn't be worried. But I thought I'd tell her. When you're sick, you do want Mummie, don't you, Uncle Horace?"

"Evidently you do," said Uncle Horace, coldly. "I suppose Bobby had been eating something he shouldn't?"

"Only green plums. But Ivy didn't know, and she gave him lots of fresh milk, oh, quarts. And he ate nearly a tree of plums. Ivy found them under his pillow. And they were under mine too. Ivy says if he dies it will be my fault."

If Bedelia looked for comfort, she was disappointed. Uncle Horace lighted a fresh cigarette, and walked away.

"You'd better go back to bed," he said carelessly.

Bedelia's eyes filled. How different Uncles were from Mummies! She would go upstairs. Perhaps they would let her sit beside Bobby, if he was better.

She would show him her caterpillar—the one she hadn't let him touch that afternoon. It was in her soap dish. At any rate, Mummie was upstairs. And even Ivy was better than an uncle.

Horace left the garden and walked through the village. Sallum Prior was all asleep. Not a light in any window—not a window, he observed, was open, and he conjured up an unpleasing vision of the Sallumites breathing heavily in the bad air of their low small rooms.

A farther vision of Bobby "sicking" all over the carpet, disgusting child! wasn't pleasant either. And Crystal, of course, would not leave the brat before morning. That was the worst of women with children—nothing else counted. There was much to be said for the childless—for the unmarried —for the celibate. He found himself again confronting a slender figure in a little knitted black shawl. He saw again the pale face, the green blue eyes wide in an ecstasy not of this world.

An hour later he returned to a quiet house. A night light burned in the hall beside his bed-room candle. There was a tray there too, with some sandwiches and a glass jug of the weak iced Russian tea he liked.

He softened a little at that, especially as both tea and sandwiches were very good. But when he had mounted to his room and Crystal opened Bobby's door, he hardened again.

"I'm sorry, Horace, but the poor shrimp has been pretty sick."

"Will you come downstairs again?" said Horace, not urgently.

"I mustn't. He still has fever. I don't dare leave him."

"It was only unripe fruit, according to Bedelia," said her visitor shortly.

Her eyes filled as Bedelia's had done—and Horace, in a belated contrition, kissed her with a hurried, "He'll be all right. Try to get some sleep," and turned to his own door.

Crystal stood a moment looking after him. Perhaps she would have spoken, but a frightened little voice called "Mummie!" and she hastily returned to the sick child.

Horace shut his door, not, considering there was illness in the house, too quietly.

CHAPTER VII

SERBIA IN OXFORDSHIRE

Early July smiled on the Pond House as serenely as late June.

If Crystal cried herself to sleep that first night she did not show it. A dainty little breakfast had gone up on a tray to Horace about nine. When he came down, very handsome in white flannels, it seemed there were imperative letters to answer. The little drawing room was given solemnly over to his needs, while a rather pale and pathetic Bobby allowed himself to be read to in the orchard, whither his mother and Ivy transported him in the long garden chair. Bedelia, Finn McCoul and Mr. Honey sat as near as possible to the invalid while Crystal, who read untiringly, devoted two hours to Mrs. Nesbit's absorbing story of the "Would-be-Goods."

By one o'clock Master McClinton had sufficiently recovered to sit at the garden table, very near to Mummie, please; and to outward seeming it was a lively and united family that awaited Mrs. Rumbold's imposing entry with the soup.

After the meal, more letters for Horace. A last look at the guest rooms for Crystal. There were only two, Horace's and a larger one with two beds.

Katty had telegraphed only "Coming three strong on the four ten" . . . so it was to be hoped the strangers would fit into the two-bedded room. Bedelia would surrender her room to Tante Katty, "who always brings presents," said Miss McClinton reflectively, "so it is a pleasure to be generous to her."

"Would Bedelia accompany Uncle Horace to the train to meet the guests?"

"No, thank you," firmly, from Bedelia.

Crystal looked a little anxiously at Horace. Would he think her children's manners no better than their tummies? But Horace's own manner was perfect.

"We could leave that order for the dog collar," he said, as tho' absently, "and look at mud guards and knives.'

"O Bedelia, do go! You could bring ve mud guard wiv Tante Katty!"

So Miss McClinton relented, and later allowed herself to be made as "flossy" as a critical small brother advised.

They had left the house when Horace came back unexpectedly to the little drawing room. Crystal stood by the mirror, looking seriously at her own reflection. She turned as seriously to Horace when he entered.

"Is that what it is, dear? Have I gone off in my looks?" she said.

Horace drew her tenderly to him,—the first time that day.

"Gone off! You've gone on. You're handsomer

than ever. But something is troubling me, Crystal. I'll tell you very soon. Trust me, dearest."

Crystal's eyes studied him with reviving happiness.

"I'm sorry if you're bothered," she murmured. "But, oh, I'm glad I'm not losing the only thing I hold you by,—my tiresome looks!" And when Horace had kissed her with all the old time passion, and had even come back to kiss her yet once and twice more, she felt that she was quite cheerful again.

"Mummie, Mummie!" came her youngest's voice as Crystal, in her soft white, descended the funny old stairway some time after six. "It's soldiers! live soldiers wiv Tante Katty! Me and Finn McCoul met ve fly by Selwood's, so it's true!"

Indeed, Finn McCoul followed close on Bobby's heels barking vigorous confirmation.

"Quiet, Finn McCoul!" cautioned Crystal, hurrying to meet her guests. She encountered beaming Dicky the Driver bringing in their bags. Horace was handing Katty from the fly, and Bedelia, with pink cheeks, drew forward a smiling stranger in uniform. Behind him, also smiling, a second figure in the same uniform, a figure much taller than the rest of them, much younger than anyone but the children. Both saluted as she appeared.

"Katty's Serbians, of course!" Crystal liked them on sight. And when her sister presented them with unusual formality, and they had kissed her hand, looking at her with open if respectful admiration, she smiled at them as at old friends.

"They have been recalled to Belgrade, worse luck!" said Lady Freke, "and I insisted on their coming down to you for a little holiday first."

"We always do what the Lady Freke commands," said Dakovich. "I do not think otherwise we could have the courage to come to a stranger as to an old friend."

"I am sure you have discovered how much my sister enjoys having guests, and in that at least I am just like her," replied Crystal. "And I am always hoping new comers will love my Oxfordshire."

"Mrs. McClinton has the ardour of the convert," put in Horace. "We Americans, if we are converted to England at all, go over so completely that we spend the rest of our lives making other converts."

"But you Americans and the English are the same, is it not so?" asked Stefan. *"Au fond,* that is?"

"Au root," said Lady Freke, flippantly. "But we're two quite different plants."

"Pleece?" asked Boyovich—and when Stefan had translated this for him, he said vehemently:

"No, no, no, no! You not English—you not American!—We respect English—not lofe—we admire American—not lofe. We respect, admire, *and* lofe you, Madame" (to Katty), "and you, Madame" (to Crystal), "and, and little—Mademoiselle and Monsieur," gathering the two children to him despite their wriggles to escape.

"And evidently not Mr. Dimock!" mocked Katty.

"O pardon, Monsieur Dimock!" said Boyovich in distress. "I not know how to make understand you me——" He spoke rapidly to Stefan, who explained,

"Captain Boyovich would say he cannot ascertain Mr. Dimock's nationality—but with the ladies, he is sure they are not English and not American—he has never, pardon Serb frankness,—he has never loved American or English before."

"Irish!" announced Lady Freke triumphantly. "Now am I not justified? Serbia can love Ireland where she only admires or respects America and England!"

"Revolutionnaire?" exclaimed Boyovich.

"If to be a Home Ruler is revolutionnaire, behold one! Only one—My sister is a Conservative—Mr. Dimock is Liberal—on the outside" (with a wicked nod to Horace), "and you, Captain Boyovich?"

"Revolutionnaire, Madame—heart, head, body!" and Boyovich kissed Lady Freke's hand.

"As a perfectly good hostess," announced Crystal, "I am within my rights in ordering you all to your rooms to prepare for dinner—no tea today, 'tis too late—but dinner at seven."

"Of course I go up with Tante Katty," remarked Bedelia.

"O Mummie, can't I go too? Vere is a reason."

"Children, you've no sense of shame." Crystal put her arm around her little sister. "This person always brings the pirates wonderful presents," she explained, and Horace offered to take Bobby's place as host to the Serbian guests.

Tante Katty was accordingly escorted with affectionate zeal up to Bedelia's room, whence shrieks of joy could be heard directly, and Bobby, emerging first, made a triumphant descent into the garden with a bicycle bell of so fearful a resonance that his mother fled with her hands to her ears. His unwarranted departure at that hour for an obvious tour of the village was not interfered with, and the clang of this new instrument of torture, growing blessedly fainter, could be distinguished even above Miss McClinton's vociferous rapture as she also sought Mummie for congratulation.

"What I have been simply *dying* for!" Bedelia was in ecstasies. "O Mummie, Tante Katty does understand children! It's a darling! It's a *he*—his name is Obadiah! O Mummie!"

"Obadiah" was a large white rat.

"Katty!" Crystal called up to her sister's window. "Hadn't I troubles enough?"

"I dont 'lofe' children," came from Lady Freke, as she looked out of the rose surrounded window of Bedelia's room, "and they don't lofe me. But I can at any rate purchase their respect—and Obadiah will introduce a new element, the Biblical, into this family. Be thankful it is not Mrs. Obadiah, Crystal."

They sat late over dinner that evening. The Serbians were apparently delighted. By some magic Katty had brought Captain Boyovich to the point of actually talking. He had convinced everybody, himself included, that he could never speak

English. Curiously, he did not know French, and although he had studied German at school for years, he would not, he said with Slav bitterness, speak a word of that language.

His efforts now were extraordinary, but at any rate he could be understood, and Stefan translated everything that Boyovich could not himself understand.

Horace observed that Crystal studied the younger Serbian with obvious pleasure. She plainly liked his devotion to Katty, the way he said "Majka" to her. Merton and Hazleby called her Mater, English schoolboy fashion (and pronounciation). Was Crystal comparing him to Katty's own boys? Horace wondered.

The evening was so lovely, the light on the hills so dreamlike, they carried the table bodily out from the rose arbour, and placed it crosswise on the lawn, where they could all look toward the Chilterns.

"It is primateef," Boyovich said joyfully. "It is true life."

"The man has the face to prefer your dinner on the grass, Crystal, to all Grimmer does for him at Cadogan Square," said Lady Freke.

"He is a poet, Majka," Stefan said gravely. "To him Nature is more than friends."

"No!" protested Boyovich. "Understand me. Nature" (he called it Nay-chure) "Nature sans, sans, Lofe—it is—*not*. But here is Nature—*and* Lofe. I say, I say——" (he paused for help).

"You say wonderfully," Crystal aided him.

"What, exactly, does Captain Boyovich wish to say?" she appealed to Stefan.

The boy replied after a moment's talk with his friend, "He says he finds Nature here, and although he is a stranger, he finds Love too, and that, by his theory of life, is perfection."

There was a moment's silence after the young Serbian's serious full voice had ceased. This alien people . . . of whom one knew so little—in how far was their outlook one's own? Did these two represent the body of their countrymen? This poet, who was so gay . . . this boy, who was so grave? Both soldiers, a profession an American had naturally belittled before the war, and even now discounted?

"I've read somewhere . . . long ago, of course, that the Slav temperament accepts all conditions," said Horace, "without protest."

"But that spells apathy," said Lady Freke. "Was ever anything farther from these two than apathy?"

"You are too kind to my nation, Moth-er," smiled the younger Serb. "We do accept too often, without protest. Yet probably that is what kept us alive in old days as a people. Active resentment would have led to our extermination."

Boyovich had strolled unconventionally from the table, his glass of wine in his hand. He began to sing now, even more unconventionally, in a thin, very sweet tenor, curious foreign words, to as curious music; it was not a tune, in the European sense. Horace tried in vain to seize upon any rhythm in it.

The little maids had brought out the coffee, and stood embarrassed, each holding a tray, for the singer was directly in their path. He turned suddenly, and seeing what was wrong, ejaculated,

"I sor-rye! Exkuce!" and took Ivy's tray from her, with a smile that confused her still further. Ada, more accustomed to serving, placed her tray quickly in front of her mistress, and escaped. But the Captain had now changed his plaintive song to a very gay one, and, to Ivy's agonized astonishment, began a dance around the lawn with the tray at arm's length.

"I do you Serbian national dance, Madame!" he exulted, amidst the applause and laughter, but the position of the coffee pot looked perilous, and Stefan, with two long steps after him, deftly secured the tray, and holding it firmly on one side, made a pretence of saluting his superior officer, and returned to the table.

"He's more spontaneous than an Irishman," asserted Lady Freke, "and there is no higher praise —from me, at any rate."

Boyovich stood looking blankly at the others. Then with a quick step to Crystal's side, asked charmingly, "You an-grye? Not?" and upon her laughing "No, no, Captain, I'm delighted!" he kissed her hand and subsided into his place at her right.

Next morning, as they were walking, all of them, to show the guests the Icknield Way, strange old Saxon road that cuts across this corner of Oxford-

shire, Horace manœuvred Katty away from the others.

"Have you any news from the cloister?" he said.

"Have you talked to Crystal about Daphne yet?" countered Lady Freke, with a quick look at her companion.

"There has not been time," Horace said, feeling the blood in his face. "Have you seen her?"

"Daphne? Dear no! She doesn't encourage callers. Crystal will go out there, next time she is in town. But Crystal is nearer to her than I have ever been."

"No one could have been kinder to her than you."

"Oh — kind—on the — when-its-not-too-much-trouble-lay. But Crystal has been mother, sister and friend—and if any human being, outside her convent, could influence Daphne, it's Crystal."

Horace winced. "But she hasn't persuaded her not to enter," he hazarded.

"No, Crystal's on a higher moral plane than I am. She won't interfere with any creature's thoughts—I draw the line only at interfering with actions."

"You would keep her in the world, but not care what disturbance this caused her mental attitude?"

"Exactly. And Crystal would never, never, by look or word, interfere with her thought, let alone her action."

"Are they fond of each other?"

"Genuinely. Crystal doesn't love your sex indiscriminately, as I do—but she does her own. I love a man because it's a man. Crystal loves a woman—or even more, a baby—because it's a

woman—or a baby. And to Crystal, Daphne is both woman and baby."

"Well, if Crystal won't interfere, and you and I can't, there's evidently nothing to be done. How long before she takes the veil?"

"That depends. She may be a postulant for a long while before she's a novice. You ought to know much more about this than poor heathen I," said Katty. "I believe though, that if her vocation is particularly evident, she may enter very shortly."

"Even then 'tis not irrevocable," mused Horace. "She will not be committed to it till the novitiate is over."

"Queer lot, we are," reflected Lady Freke.

He wondered what was passing through the keen, rather malicious little mind of his lively friend. How much did she know? How much did she guess? She could not realise the depth of Crystal's devotion to himself, for however light-minded Katty was about women in general, her affection for her sister was profound. She would never, for instance, have played on his possibly "falling for" Daphne—he relapsed into the vernacular—nor on her "falling for" him if she had even guessed . . .

"Oh, Uncle Horace!" shrilled Bobby's voice. "You've passed ve Icknield Way!" corroborated loudly by Finn McCoul.

"Say it," Katty urged her companion, "say it, Horace!"

"Say——?"

"Say that excellent man, King Herod, has never

been rightly credited for his efficient methods with children!"

Horace had no time to answer, for Bobby had fallen panting against his aunt, and Finn McCoul circled about the group, barking energetically.

Accordingly they went back to the others. Crystal walked between the Serbians. Bedelia, who was carrying Obadiah on an extended hand, followed cautiously.

"Strange invasion of these old Saxon fields," murmured Horace, half to himself. "America, Ireland, Serbia, in the ancient Icknield Way!"

"More curious still," said Crystal, who overheard him. "Captain Boyovich has turned Bedelia's fiddle into his rightful instrument, the 'gusle."* At that the Captain held it up. "The Icknield Way has surely never heard a Serbian bard before!"

"A Guslar gusling on a gusle," said Bedelia to Obadiah, settling herself on the grass as she saw Boyovich do on a tree stump. And she looked at him steadily with blue eyes, as did Obadiah with pink ones.

The others followed suit, forming the little circle around the poet that he evidently loved. He held the improvised gusle rather stiffly on his left knee and drew the bow across one string, using that only, although the fingering was rather elaborate. It was surprising how much music he got out of that one string. Presently a rapt look came into his haggard face, and he began his song.

"That's historic, Majka," Stefan whispered to

*Gusle—pronounced guss-leh (guss like puss).

Lady Freke, "a Serbian national ballad, centuries old," and then fell silent, looking off over the fields as though, like Boyovich, he had forgotten them all.

Bobby and Finn McCoul slipped away, but Bedelia, with Obadiah on her shoulder, continued to regard guslar and gusle with solemnity. They all had some of a child's wonder, Horace thought to himself, in face of this unknown uncomprehended people. What must it be like to be returning as these two were that very night, to a distraught country, a tiny country, beggared and devastated by an atrocious war, surrounded by enemies, with no stability, no capital, no security? Yet rich and stable enough to have produced these fine flowers of a civilisation so much older than his own that it made Horace feel new and green.

He wondered if their women were as distinguished as the men—wondered what they themselves thought of their women. Boyovich had said, that morning, that he was a Socialist, that above all he was for world democracies, and that women must be included.

"When I have woman," he said, meaning when he should have a wife, "she my friend, no my slave." But they had all laughed at the readiness with which he allowed everything to be done for him, particularly by the women, from Crystal to the little maids.

"The Captain is a democrat," Lady Freke had commented tartly, "with the inclinations of a Czar." And Horace easily pictured him when he'd "have woman." He'd be undoubtedly devoted, perhaps

even faithful, but that woman would spend her life waiting on her democratic lord.

Horace speculated farther—looking at the American women near him—one so amusing, one so beautiful and gracious—both such capable, friendly creatures. Did the Serbians understand them, their freedom, their coldness? Not likely. Even Englishmen looked dubiously at the position of woman in the United States—Serbians must wonder at many things.

What would they, for example, say to Daphne? They were Greek Catholics, he supposed—Orthodox, they called themselves. In how far did their religious institutions agree with the Roman Catholics? They had convents, he imagined (quite wrongly). Nuns, of course, he thought (wrongly again). Was there in all that unknown country of theirs a nun with a pale face and blue-green eyes? Yes—he could imagine that. He couldn't picture a French, a German, an Italian Daphne—but funnily enough, he could see her Serbian.

The music stopped.

"It might be an old Irish air with the lilt out of it," Katty was saying. "And Guslar, you might be an Irish harpist."

"I suppose, in a way, Ireland and Serbia are not unlike," came rather surprisingly from Crystal.

Katty sat upright. "I believe you've found the key, Crystal" (with her cheeks suddenly flaming). "It's true. They are alike. Now I know why I loved you all on first sight," she laughed to Dakovich. "Face, eyes, type, manner—it's absolutely

true, you might be Irish! Stefan, you omadhaun! You're the melancholy young Irishman—the Captain, the irresponsible—put him in rags, he'd be the Shaughraun. Everyone I've seen I can fit to some Irish example. . . ."

"Ireland has not endured what we have, Majka," Stefan said, "but you have told me that she also has suffered."

"Suffered!" Katty's tone was so vehement they all turned to her. She rose as she said it, looking away from them. "What injustice there is in the world!" And she walked off quickly, down the grassy path.

Stefan also rose, and would have followed her, but Crystal shook her head. "My little sister flares up sometimes, but the fire burns out in a moment. Better leave her."

Boyovich played again, impishly now, and as Bobby and Finn McCoul reappeared, he sprang up and led the way toward home, the children, Obadiah safely held aloft, capering after him, with Finn McCoul in almost hysterical excitement. Horace followed with Crystal, talking of his Serbian meditations, and Stefan, patting Lady Freke's hand, held it firmly in his arm, and came along with her, both silent.

The three guests left on the late afternoon train. Horace would stay on, and Alicia Norton (Peter and Aileen's only daughter) was coming that evening, Crystal took pains to say.

"I told you Crystal had an indomitable tŏleration

of girls," said Katty as they waited for Dicky the Driver.

"As you have for boys, my dear," agreed Crystal.

"I'm terrified of girls," confessed Katty. "Now a boy, a man ('tis all the same), is an infinitely simple creature. He knows what he wants, you know what he wants—you get it for him if you can —a smoke, a game, a horse, a commission, a seat in the House of Commons, a wife—but a girl! She doesn't know what she wants, and you dare not tell her. No, give me boys! And after nearly a half century's experience of all kinds" (she smiled at Stefan), "give me Serbian boys!"

CHAPTER VIII

"THE ANGRY GODS"

ALICIA NORTON arrived on the train that took the others to town. Horace went in with them to meet her, and found her a tall, self-possessed young person, with nothing of either Peter Norton or Aileen's ease of manner, but handsome in what he characterised as the English way. She was the Norton's only child. Her sister, older by two years, had been killed in France, in 1917.

Alicia was barely twenty. Horace seemed to her quite an old gentleman, and she did not disguise her lack of interest in him. To Crystal she was, if not affectionate, at least smiling and friendly; the children were apparently devoted to her, and she met Finn McCoul and Obadiah with flattering enthusiasm.

Her father and mother were to follow at the end of the month. In the meantime the household settled into the delightful routine of an informal country cottage. Horace sent for a car, put the chauffeur up at the *Royal George* (he valued his own restful holiday far too highly to run the car himself), and took the others on long or short jaunts all over this lovely Oxfordshire. On warm days they went over to Shillingford, where fair swim-

ming could be had. But mostly, Horace idled happily in the garden, reading; or wrote long letters for South American mail day.

The house ran on greased wheels. Horace the Epicurean, finding everything he wished always at hand, receiving no slightest jar from either servants or children, realised only that he was comfortable, and that Crystal was probably an excellent housekeeper.

The image of Daphne receded in his mind. Crystal did not press him to tell her what had bothered him at the time of his arrival. He did indeed say one evening, when the moon made for romance, when Alicia had gone early to bed, and Crystal came out to the garden carrying a tray with something tinkling in a glass, and stood a moment, unconsciously lovely and graceful in the moonlight, as she looked for him:

"My dearest, keep me always with you. When you are near I am as faithful as a dog, tame as a cat, dependable as an old horse."

But Crystal, tranquilly busy those wonderful July days, the world-old instinct of the woman making the man happy her only guide, took no alarm. He must go back to the Argentine in August . . . it behooved her only to keep him till then "a blithe contented man."

No cloud hung over her, and all clouds must soon disappear from this comfortable England. July slipped deliciously along. The papers, to be sure, contained occasional leading articles on the Dalmatian business . . . but the papers did not interest

them particularly. Crystal was too happy and Horace too idle.

Toward the end of the month Katty motored down with Meredith Dyfed.

"The Pond House looked like a safe Paradise from London anxieties," she said. "Of course you Babes in the Wood don't realise what's going on."

"Do you mean Fiume?" asked Alicia intelligently.

"You forget that Alicia was never a Babe in the Wood, Lady Freke," said Dyfed.

"True. You were never a babe even in the cradle, my child," apologised Katty. "Yes . . . at Fiume. The apple cart is possibly going to upset."

"That's what it is to know Mr. Meredith Dyfed," offered Crystal.

"Meredith Dyfed! He tells me nothing. He's been a sphinx, a gentlemanly sphinx in white spats with a Van Dyke beard, this whole week . . . so I know there's a lot to be concealed. But I've had a letter from Belgrade, from Stefan."

"How is the adorable boy?" asked Crystal.

"O my dear . . . if tragedy overhangs that boy, I won't be able to bear it."

"Why should tragedy hang over him, rather than over Merton . . . or Hazleby?" said Alicia coldly.

Lady Freke looked quickly at the composed young person. "Or Hazleby . . ." she smiled to herself. "Can you connect tragedy with my bouncing, noisy pair?" she enquired aloud. "And can you fail to connect it with Dakovich? Not perhaps his own, but his country's. Even an Irishman doesn't love

Ireland as the Serb loves Serbia. Yet even now, 1919, the world fails to understand."

"What does he write?" said Horace.

"I'll read it to you." And Katty pulled a letter from the little grey hand bag she carried.

"Dear Majka:

The angry gods gather once more to our undoing. You have not seen our beautiful country. Perhaps now I shall never show it to you. No one yet believes there is new danger . . . but we know better, Captain Boyovich and I. They mean to push us to the wall. I send this by a safe friend to post in Paris. It is to say good-bye. My salutations to your sister, to the good Nortons, to Mr. Dyfed and the American stranger. And always, always, Majka, to yourself. I embrace your hand.

"Your Stefan."

"Curiously unlike an American boy," mused Horace.

"Equally unlike an English one," Alicia said.

"It's a different race, a different line of thought," Dyfed averred. "But very fine, that about the angry gods gathering once more to undo them. You for instance sometimes wonder" (he addressed Katty) "how the Irish race has kept its character and beauty through these difficult centuries . . . how much more extraordinary that the Serbian race has kept alive at all!"

It was a soft, warm afternoon. They were drinking their tea in the orchard, on the platform around the old apple tree. The air was intoxicating with

the smell of ripe plums, and over the beds of mignonette the bees buzzed heavily. Crystal's guests were all quiet. The young Montenegrin's letter seemed to make unreal this peaceful English scene.

"I asked Stefan once, in the early days of our acquaintance, what class he belonged to, what he represented exactly," Katty said at last, evenly, as one speaks about a friend long gone.

"I wish I had your courage, Katty." This from Horace.

"You mean my cheek. Well, he said, quite simply, 'Peasant, Madame.' *Peasant?* 'You mean the farming class, the small proprietor,' I said. 'No, Madame, I am a peasant. We are all peasants.' 'If you are a peasant,' says I, 'show me a prince.'"

"It's true." Dyfed confirmed this. "Serbia is ninety per cent peasant, and the remaining ten per cent are the little bourgeoisie."

"Where are the aristocrats, the nobles? It's a kingdom; they've always had princes, a ruling class, haven't they?" demanded Horace.

"The nobles were killed off, years, generations, even centuries ago, leading their followers against the Turks. It's hard to realise from here that we owe the saving of Europe from the Turks to that one little country. The people who are left are practically all of one class, tillers of the soil. The man who owns the farm, the labourer whom he hires to work on it, are of one class, peasants."

"Do you honestly mean that Mr. Dakovich represents a peasant class?" Crystal begged.

"Dakovich would be a fine type in any class, in

any country, but he is not unusual in Serbia. And you must remember, he is Montenegrin. Serb, it is true, but the finest Serb."

"A peasant who looks like a prince . . . a plough boy who writes like a poet . . . a whole nation of these peasants who are the princes of Europe, and who are poets!" triumphed Katty.

"Yes, speak to a ragged man digging in a field," Dyfed went on. "He'll make you, then and there, a poem. Not a jingle, but really fine and dignified verses, often beautiful."

"Your Irish labourer can't do that, Katty," Horace suggested.

"No, he'll be full of rare turns and some lovely imagery . . . think of his talk in poor Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* . . . but he won't turn off a poem for you."

"Yet I've heard you say, Lady Freke," came Alicia's firm, young voice, "that the nearest to a gentleman was the Irish peasant."

"More than that," Katty answered with rising colour. "Every now and then, out of the meanest cabin, on the poorest Irish mountain, comes a real prince. The chiefs, the kings, of old days, whole tribes of supermen were submerged . . . war, persecution, famine . . . don't let me get started on what Ireland has been through . . . but every now and then comes up a true prince, a true princess; or a great general, a great poet. It's there, in the race . . . sometimes it comes out to astound you."

"And if you pin Katty down, you'll discover the prince must be O'Brien or O'Neill. An O, anyway.

She'll never admit a Mac to it! My poor child, you are only a McClinton," Crystal added to Bedelia, who appeared at that moment with something in her arms, followed by Bobby and Mr. Honey.

"Mummie!" squealed Miss McClinton. "Mr. Honey found an angel kitten in the pond. *May* I keep it?"

The angel kitten was a most deplorable little wet, half-dead object, tenderly wrapped in Miss McClinton's fresh pink frock.

"Poor, miserable little wretch!" burst out Alicia. "We'll heat some milk for it and put it near the fire."

"I shall name it Alicia, after you," said Bedelia gratefully.

"B'delia," remonstrated Bobby. "You ought to name it Mr. Honey, 'cause Mr. Honey found it. Oughtn't B'delia, Weelum Jawge?"

"Yeh," said Mr. Honey.

"Then he would never have kittens," said Bedelia. "*She* ought to be named Alicia, oughtn't she, Mr. Honey?"

"Yeh," said Mr. Honey.

"I shall name it Alicia Mooney," continued Bedelia, "'cause it has mooney eyes. Come on, both Alicias!"

The procession departed. The four who were left looked after them.

"Youth!" said Dyfed. "How enviable!"

"She's very handsome, Norton's daughter," Horace murmured.

"Meredith Dyfed means them all. He means we're

the middle aged, the onlookers," Lady Freke said, pensively.

"Yet you don't wish to be young again, Katty?" Crystal laid her hand on her sister's.

"Never, never . . . middle age is more capable, infinitely more amusing."

"And it's only youth, middle age is," said Dyfed. "Youth, a bit . . . a bit . . . not coarsened exactly. . . ."

"Say thickened," Katty advised.

"Middle age is only thickened youth?" Horace questioned it.

"I'd be young again, if I could," Dyfed said, "but I wouldn't have our Lady Freke, or Mrs. McClinton, a birthday less."

"Do you wonder that man has more invitations to dinner than the postal service can carry?" laughed Katty. "But Horace there would have us all twenty years younger."

"He's American," Dyfed commented. "Your country is the country of youth. Age doesn't interest it yet. Confound it, there's Wilkins."

His chauffeur could be seen coming through the orchard with a telegram in his hand.

Dyfed excused himself and went to meet him. They observed that he opened the envelope anxiously, not like a man who received telegrams one a minute, as Katty expressed it. He walked back to them slowly, pausing to say,

"Have the car here in a quarter of an hour, Wilkins," and he added, to Katty, "Your Dakovich was right, Lady Freke. Serbia is mobilising again."

"You'll go back to town at once, of course. I'll be ready," and Katty rose.

"O Katty, you stay with us," her sister urged. "Mr. Dyfed doesn't want you, anyway."

"My dear, do you think I'd miss a moment of the performance? Meredith Dyfed will probably not throw me a word, but I shall run no risk of losing it if he does."

"She'll turn me inside out, Mrs. McClinton. That's her cleverness, to convince you of my discretion." And Dyfed lighted a cigarette, gloomily.

"You'll come back next week, with the Nortons, little sister?"

"Can you put me up?" returned Katty.

"I've taken some rooms at the Green Lion, close by. I can put up innumerable guests. 'That means you,' Mr. Dyfed, as they say on 'Keep Out' signs at home. But this is a 'Come In' sign." Crystal looked kindly at Dyfed. He was very pale, she thought.

"Thank you." He kissed her hand. (Not for nothing had he lived in old days so much in Vienna.) "Don't count on Norton; and I can say for myself, alas, that I won't be able to leave London."

"Then it is really serious?" Crystal asked.

"Nothing can seem really serious now," he smiled, "after what we've been through. But every move, especially on the Balkan chess board, is important."

Ten minutes later he handed Lady Freke into the car.

CHAPTER IX

SIR FRANCIS MORRILL

That was late July. Another beautiful week brought them no special news, although they tried now to read between the lines in both Norton's and Dyfed's papers. But like all Americans, and most English, they failed, even now, to feel more than amusedly interested in a political situation on the Adriatic.

Alicia was writing her college thesis. Alicia Mooney, Obadiah and Finn McCoul provided the serious business of life for Bedelia. Her little brother rejoiced in Mr. Honey's society. Crystal went about her various errands, Horace with her. He liked the obvious pleasure it gave the villagers to have "Her oop to Pond House" pause for a talk over the hedge when potatoes were being dug, or onions pulled. Crystal now knew every soul in Sallum Prior. The serious interchange of gifts between the Pond House and the cottages entertained our Buenos Aires millionaire immensely. Every day a basket of plums or green apples went to some villager. . . . Next day, unfailingly, an offering was quietly left with Mrs. Rumbold for Crystal . . . generally a cauliflower, it being known that the Pond House cauliflowers had failed this

year. Sometimes a bunch of highly coloured blossoms, or the first blackberries . . . or even two eggs, still four pence apiece! . . . but a sturdy pride made it necessary, Horace gathered, to return something for every gift from "Her oop to Pond House."

Shepherd Gammon was now well enough to hobble over *Bittums,* every day or so, to look after Crystal's vegetables, but not well enough to work, poor Shepherd. However, various small boys from the village, Mr. Honey included, did work at remunerative rates under Shepherd's stern eye. Horace liked to watch the gaunt figure and fine rugged head of the old man, as he limped about the kitchen garden. He took him home in the car, and would have offered to send it for him daily; but one look at the poor old boy's agonised face on the first trip was enough.

"Thank ee, sir," said Shepherd, stiffly, as he got out. "Legs was made for walkin' on. No more o' yon for me. It be short way to hell."

The other villagers having no such sentiments, Horace found much entertainment in sending or taking them in turn for motor rides. It was so easy to play Beneficence down here in this primitive existence! Crystal wondered how long the simple life would satisfy him. For the moment he was evidently wholly charmed, and assured her that he would sell out *Bovo* and return to Oxfordshire immediately to farm.

"Uncle Horace fancies himself no end as a farmer," Bedelia confided to her little brother with

something of her Tante Katty's tartness. "And he couldn't raise a parsnip!"

But Horace did meditate rather seriously on a gentleman farmer's occupation. A losing proposition, financially, of course, but he was now rich enough to lose gaily. He had never studied growing things before; the response of the "good brown earth" seemed to him a daily miracle. He wrote verses to it, or perhaps to his own sensations upon beholding it . . . to Crystal, tall and lovely as a white lily in her long box-bordered walks; to the ancient peace and beauty of this walled-in garden. Could existence, after all, offer anything fuller or riper than this well ordered alternation of comfort and kindness?

Again he assured Crystal that he had been considering the matter seriously for a long time. And indeed he had dallied with it for several days.

Unfortunately, the Nortons announced a visit at this time. Horace was of those people whose imagination, ahead of reality, always saw the reflection of himself in other eyes.

He could not, some way, fancy approval of his scheme in either Peter Norton's abstracted gaze, or in Aileen's slightly malicious one.

"When do they come down?" he asked.

"Tomorrow."

"The devil they do!"

"I hope you won't mind?" Crystal asked a little anxiously. But even as she spoke, a perspiring small boy leaped from a bicycle at the gate, and brought a telegram.

"From Peter Norton," Crystal read. "Called to Paris. Must postpone visit. Thousand regrets. Aileen motoring down alone."

They put off dinner till eight o'clock, but as Aileen did not arrive, and as the arrival of Aileen was always a delightful uncertainty, they sat down without her.

At half past eight, they heard the car outside the garden wall.

"I've brought down the Morrills," Aileen's voice called out gaily, as Crystal ran to meet her. "It was too harrowing in town. And Meredith Dyfed said you had plenty of room."

"I have indeed, and I'm enchanted to see them. Lady Morrill, you know Alicia, of course, and this is Mr. Dimock—Sir Francis, Mr. Dimock, of Buenos Aires." Horace shook hands with a tall, pale, aquiline man, who might be of any age from twenty-five to forty-five. Of Lady Morrill he had only a glimpse, as she and Aileen were hurried away by Alicia. She seemed years older than Sir Francis, and with little of his fineness. "Aristocratic," Horace said to himself, "is a misused word, but in this case decidedly applicable to Sir Francis Morrill."

Dinner had been put back, but in a few moments the party assembled, and Mrs. Rumbold, in her element, served a second and incredibly good meal.

"Peter Norton is a wild man this day," said Aileen, as they found themselves in their places. "He says we'll be in for another European war if the Conference doesn't straighten out. I was being

driven mad. I told him to let them have their war, but for heaven's sake not to bring it into the bosom of his family. So he banged the door and went off to Paris."

"You forget Dad's responsibilities," said Alicia, as though she were speaking to a child, not to a mother. The others laughed.

"Does it look very bad for the League of Nations?" asked Horace.

Sir Francis Morrill answered slowly, in his quiet English voice, "It couldn't look worse."

"Which is your fault, you Americans!" said Aileen wickedly.

Sir Francis' pale face looked paler than before. "Who can say? Yet if America won't stand by us, we may all, even England, go under."

"Ridiculous nonsense!" fulminated Lady Morrill, whom Horace now really looked at for the first time. She was on his right, but till then had been talking with Alicia. She was rather a red faced woman, who had probably been handsome in her youth. Now she was too tightly corseted and wore bracelets.

"I'm badly informed," said Horace with his agreeable voice. "I've never understood the Balkan question, in particular, either before or after the war."

"Nor has anyone else!" boomed Lady Morrill.

Sir Francis continued as though he had not heard her, but in a colder tone. "The Balkan question is infinitely more serious to this country than we realise. Our differentiations have been all wrong. Even after war began we petted Bulgaria and neg-

lected Serbia. We had always taken Roumania at her own valuation as Roman, and lumped the others as Slav. We should never, to go back, have allowed the formation of the Albanian kingdom. We should never, never, have winked at the Austrian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Above all, we should have worked for a Greater Serbia, and for the protection, through Serbia, of our own routes to the East. All this is an old story . . ."

"Sir Francis was out there a long time," Aileen put in. "You're hearing an authority on the Near East."

"Abominable countries!" commented Lady Morrill. "But I wasn't cut out for a diplomat's wife."

Horace could see that she certainly wasn't. He wished very much to talk to her husband, but as he himself was between Aileen and Lady Morrill, and as Sir Francis was evidently being soothed by Crystal's gentle attention, he had no immediate opportunity.

After dinner they walked to the Big House, the Manor of Sallum Prior, whose owners were away in Italy. And Horace and Morrill made lighting their cigars an excuse for falling behind the four women.

"You are plainly not happy about the situation, Sir Francis," said Horace, as they passed into the long avenue that led up to the Big House.

His companion laughed a little ruefully. "You know us well enough, Mr. Dimock, to be prepared for more colossal blunders on our part."

"They will be the blunders of democracy," answered Horace. "My own country is not one to look askance."

"Your blunders are made at home, within your own borders—(almost too much so, if you'll forgive me!) Ours, the worst ones, that is, are made abroad," said the Englishman.

"Where is the particular blunder now?" asked the American.

Francis Morrill looked a moment through the great trees before he answered. "On the Adriatic. We are again face to face with a crisis. And we are again absurdly unprepared."

"I shall put my money on England, just the same," laughed Horace.

"You mean we'll muddle through? Yes, probably. Yet what complications we might save out there! My own party is in power, but convinced Liberal as I am, I know the other side to be more sensitive to what affects our honour as a nation."

Horace looked at him curiously. Politics was really a great game in this country. He hoped he would be as sensitive to what affected America's good name. Our quibbling on the Panama question occurred to him, and our hesitation in entering the war. Had he not blushed for his own people? He liked to think so. But Francis Morrill was evidently deeply concerned with what was, so far, a possibility only. He did not say, and the American would not ask, what he feared. But it was not difficult to formulate. Would England, that was what he was thinking, would England stand by the

little peoples? Would she sacrifice her Italian interests to the hypothetical rights of the new Jugo-Slavia? Would she play the game as your true sportsman, as Sir Francis Morrill, would have her play it?

"The saving thing with your people," he said aloud, unconsciously revealing his thoughts, "is that you play to play. It makes for a square deal. Other nations play to win."

"I believe the square deal, as you call it," answered Morrill, obviously pleased, "is in the English, as it is in the American, blood. Lady Freke would tell you we'd not been square with Ireland. And she's right. But elsewhere . . ."

"Francis!" came Lady Morrill's voice. "Mrs. McClinton is taking us home by the lower gate."

They all met in the great sweep of lawn between the Big House and the carriage way. A light in a smaller upper window was probably a servant's. Otherwise, the enormous old mansion was dark. It was past ten, but the English twilight is slow to leave. Around them rose huge trees. The fields sloped away from them toward the old Icknield Way, and up again to the Chilterns. No lights to be seen anywhere; the country silent and beautiful under the luminous July night.

"It's hard to realise your England is an island, and a little island, when one looks at these endless woods and meadows," said Horace.

"Yet one's comfort at some moments," responded Morrill, "is in remembering that we are on an island,

that the sea surrounds, and always has surrounded England, whatever airships may do."

"I'm tired," his wife announced. "How do we go home?"

Horace offered her his arm, on which she at once leaned heavily.

"Let's go down 'Wormcraft,'" advised Crystal. "It's the short cut from here."

"Another trace of the Dragon?" asked Sir Francis.

"Yes. Saint George had one of his numerous fights with the Dragon, so we like to believe, right here, on that hill side. The Dragon, or as you evidently know they say hereabouts, the Worm, was almost too clever for Saint George, and the lane there is called 'Wormcraft' to this day. That at least is the story."

"Wormcraft" led to the "Hill Road," and that into "Cheesefoot." Aileen and her daughter had chosen to be put up at the Green Lion, where Crystal had taken some funny little old rooms for the summer. The men walked down with them while Crystal and Lady Morrill turned in at the Pond House gate.

"Your American women are wonderful," said Sir Francis. "They are teaching us a lot. But I don't know anywhere two more delightful ones than Mrs. McClinton and Katty Freke."

"Yet you've probably heard Katty say," answered Horace, "that she prays her sons will marry English or Irish wives."

"Yes," Francis Morrill agreed. "But she also

says if she had a daughter she'd pray for an American husband for her."

"What does her English husband say to that?"

"Oh, Freke!" laughed Morrill. "He's still charmed with everything she says."

Next morning the Morrills were for returning early to town. But Aileen said calmly that nothing would induce her to go back to Peter Norton, for a day or two at any rate. They were all used to Aileen's vagaries, even Lady Morrill, and the morning was so lovely that when Crystal said, as they lingered over their breakfast in the garden. "Why don't you nice people stay down too?" even Lady Morrill consented.

"There's nothing I can do in town," confessed her husband. "I'm not *persona grata* at the Foreign Office just now, and if Mrs. McClinton is angelic enough to keep a gloomy guest, I can't say how grateful I am to be out of London."

"We were dining tonight with your mother, and Sunday with Lady Freke," his wife reminded him.

"Your mother won't mind, Francis, if you telegraph her off," affirmed Aileen, "and suppose we all go up on Sunday and dine with Katty?"

The next two days were warm and lovely. Francis Morrill, for all his intention of avoiding town, went two miles every morning to the nearest telephone station, but said little of politics, English or European. Yet Horace divined an absorbing anxiety.

"If Francis were lighted from the inside by a

holy candle," said Aileen, "he couldn't look more like a wax saint."

"More shame to us to understand so little what it all means to him," responded Crystal, who did not know whether to be glad or sorry she had kept him. If he had not been there the others would have considered little beyond the tranquillity of the moment.

On their last day Crystal insisted on their all motoring over to Oxford. Perhaps his old college would distract Sir Francis. But he wandered about like a lost spirit. Even the beauty of the gardens of St. John's, where, if anywhere, poor Morrill thought he would find rest, failed to interest him. They dined in a funny old inn where the joint they ordered for the meal was unhooked from its nail over the driveway. The food of England might still be limited, but this dinner was delicious.

They didn't talk much as they motored home, although when Horace stopped the car to look back at the towers and spires of Oxford in the twilight, Aileen said, "Oxford is one of Katty's 'Three Towns.'"

"I should think Lady Freke would claim thirty sooner than three," Horace took her up. "What are her three?"

"Siena, Oxford, Cork."

"Extraordinary choice!" disapproved Lady Morrill.

"But how like Katty!" Francis Morrill smiled for the first time that day. "She is a wonderful person."

When they reached the Pond House they found a characteristic telegram from the lady in question.

"Expect you all six tomorrow, eight o'clock dinner, you lucky ones in peaceful Oxfordshire. Here Dalmatian fat in fire. Imagine my anxiety Stefan. What will your blessed England do? God save Ireland anyhow. KATTY FREKE."

"Yes, Katty is a wonder," thought Horace, very thankful Crystal wasn't.

They all drove to town next afternoon in the Morrill's car, the luggage in Horace's. Crystal went up the orchard at the last moment to get some lavender for Katty, and there Horace followed her. She looked very handsome, he said to himself, in her big white blanket coat, a close white turban on her brown hair.

"What is it, dearest?" he asked. "You look sadder than a world at peace warrants."

"I shouldn't let private worries count when public ones are so splendidly over, should I?" she smiled at him, although her grey eyes were very near tears. "I'm having the most mid-Victorian sentiments, Horace."

"Why?"

"Why, indeed? But it's as though I were seeing something or someone for the last time . . . a presentiment! surely that's mid-Victorian? . . . that all this will never be the same again."

Horace, looking at the beautiful loving creature, at the beautiful, placid country, felt a stab at the heart. "Don't let's go," he said.

The waiting motors both sounded their horns, and Bedelia and Bobby, who had been showing Mr. Honey and the smaller live stock to the chauffeurs, came dashing up the orchard path. "Mummie! everybody's waiting."

Bedelia carried Obadiah; and Bobby, Alicia Mooney. Mr. Honey followed.

"It's not a question of choice, you see!" Crystal said with a catch in her voice. "Kiss Mummie, kiddies, and say good-bye here. You'll be very good till tomorrow? I won't forget the rewards of merit."

"Don't forget a water-mellit for Mr. Honey, too, will you, Mummie?" her son demanded.

Horace looked over the quiet Oxford country with as melting eyes as Crystal's. It was wonderful to look at her too, in her old world setting, this modern American, whose ancestors had perhaps stepped on this very spot of earth.

"It's been exquisite, Crystal," he said, "all this. I can truly say I've had the happiest four weeks of my life."

"You see? You say *have*. You feel as I do, that it's over."

"Why should it be, my dear girl?" and even as Horace spoke, he seemed to see a slender figure in a knitted shawl, with braids around a dark head.

CHAPTER X

KATTY'S DINNER

DINNER that evening, as Lady Freke said, was a family party. Norton, whom they had not expected, telephoned at eight to ask if he might come, so they waited till half past. Meredith Dyfed was there, and for Alicia, the only girl, Katty had asked a man they all loved, Allen Pearce, the landscape painter, a bachelor of thirty-five, tall and kindly, with a rumbling voice.

"The first time we've all been together since the beginning of the war!"

They all said it; and Horace, looking keenly around the table, added to himself that any member of that brilliant and lovable little circle was fortunate indeed. Even Lady Morrill seemed softened, and in a sort of tawny velvet looked almost handsome.

"We mustn't ask the news from the Peace Table, I suppose, Peter?" said Katty tentatively, for Norton had that day returned from Paris.

Norton smiled at her absently. "What's the use?" he asked, with a rare touch of the brogue. "Who can say what will come of it? Above all what are *we* doing, we English, and what *will* we do?"

"You'll play the game!" Katty took him up.

"You're splendid, Lady Freke," rumbled Allen Pearce. "I wish all Americans accepted us at your valuation."

"They will some day," Horace said seriously.

"But, Norton," Sir Francis asked, "what's the feeling now, with all of us dead tired of war talk, and these new complications?"

"We're men walking at midnight," answered Norton, with a rapt look, like a seer. "Men who don't know if they will ever see dawn, but knowing they have once seen it red with blood . . . yet not afraid."

The others sat motionless. You might not agree with Peter Norton, but he always held you.

"Fundamentally, we're sound," he went on. "We've proved that since 1914. Let no man say the contrary. But it may take time to see soundly, more to act so. I cannot believe my England will fail the world, materially or spiritually."

"Your England, you Irishman, will fail neither way!" said Katty.

"Yet it was curious, you must have observed it, Peter," mused Dyfed, "that in those early days of 1914 nobody dared look anyone else in the eye."

"I'd like to know why not?" trumpeted Lady Morrill.

"You know too well, my dear. We all know," said her husband, paler than his wont. "We were afraid we wouldn't stand by, that we would let France and Belgium go under."

"Ridiculous nonsense!" this again from Lady

Morrill. "And why talk now about the war? Tiresome, I call it."

"Tiresome!" thought Horace. That was it. *Tiresome!* What a way to sum up the tragic drama they had emerged from! Yet so all the world regarded it . . . his own countrymen and women perhaps most of all. Tiresome! Now if he himself felt like that, it would be excusable. He had been in South America most of the time, out of touch, except in so far as his business kept him in touch. Katty would have said a little scornfully that making a fortune out of the war wasn't being out of touch with it.

Still (Horace reddened to himself a little) hadn't he offered his services at once to his own government when America entered the war? And hadn't Washington responded that he was far more useful where he was, supplying the world, not to speak of the Allied armies, with *"Bovo?"*

And hadn't Crystal kept him informed as to her own and Katty's multitudinous activities? Hadn't he contributed on a princely scale . . . even Katty called it princely . . . to their war work? Katty's Belgian refugees, Crystal's distracted French ones? Hadn't he given $50,000? To be sure he bore no marks of the turmoil, unlike Dyfed and Norton, who had lost, the first an only and beloved brother; the second, a daughter; and who showed the haggard traces of personal grief in their public preoccupation. Allen Pearce, too, although he was a good thirty-five, had spent four ghastly years in the trenches, like any boy. These men bore the marks.

They were all drawn and pale. Allen Pearce, youngest of the three, had gone quite white. Was he in love with Alicia? Horace knew from his own observation that a man, to keep young, must always be in love, with someone, something . . . Norton was in love with his idea of England, Dyfed with journalism, Morrill? a question there. Certainly he couldn't be in love with Lady Morrill. He came back to Allen Pearce. Yes, Katty had put him next Alicia. Undoubtedly that was it. Horace's mind, at rest there, went back to the war.

He was between Lady Morrill and Aileen, who talked across him, of someone he didn't know, so that he was at liberty for a moment to reflect.

Did the women show the strain? He had heard Lady Morrill say she had lost twelve nephews and cousins in the war. He looked from her flushed, hard face to her husband's fine pale one . . . understanding that while she could lose, it would be only Morrill who would suffer. (What was it somebody had said of Francis Morrill? That he was lighted from within?) From Lady Morrill to Aileen Norton. Her gay smile held him. Yet Aileen had lost her older daughter, sacrificed as surely as the boys had been sacrificed . . . at the front, driving her ambulance. Alicia had, blessedly, been too young to go. Those Norton girls had their father's indomitable spirit. But Horace, in that gay smile of Aileen's, saw that it was their mother's spirit too.

Aileen was the only woman in black. Alicia wore only a black band around her primrose sleeve. Hor-

ace's eyes travelled appreciatively to Crystal, in white as always. What a beautiful woman she was! After all, American women were the most beautiful to American men, as he supposed English women were to English men. He looked across at Crystal with new ardour. At night one saw only the beauty, the smooth, softly coloured cheek above the long fine neck; those tiny wrinkles he had seen at the Pond House were lost in the pale gold of the candles.

From her to Katty . . . lively little grey-satined figure with the wicked black rosette in the white hair . . . Really, Katty was astonishing. There was a woman to grace the head of a table! Yet Horace, who saw all things in the terms of his own relation to them, wondered if it wouldn't get on a man's nerves a bit to sit too long opposite that knowing glance? He turned to Crystal's gentle uncritical gaze with relief. Those grey large eyes would never regard him with anything but sweetness. He was indeed a lucky man. And Crystal had suffered in the war. Not like those who had lost their nearest, but with a vicarious suffering; he could imagine her as a Madonna of all the Sorrows, mourning for other women's sons. He liked to think that Crystal had suffered. It enriched his own possession of her.

Katty, by a miracle, had lost no one. Her boys had come to England at the first word of need, although Merton was only eighteen, Hazleby sixteen. Both had trained as fliers, and had already a fair experience when their own country came in,

and they had transferred to the American service.

The war over, neither of them scathed, they had, by some special favour—Horace suspected their clever mother of adroit wire pulling—been sent out to Mesopotamia as observers for the American Intelligence Department—and there they were near Sir Blundell Freke, their devoted step-father.

Blundell Freke was probably bored enough by now with his life out there, yet his step-sons, whom Francis Morrill had told Horace he adored almost as much as he did their mother, must be a comfort to him. But why didn't they all come home? Men like that shouldn't be kept at the grind when lesser individuals could take their places. He, Horace, wouldn't have stuck it out. Tiresome . . . yes, that was the word. After all, he felt it himself. Tiresome. Only now he felt that his feeling was a natural reaction against the long suspense, the inevitable need of a fine mind for more constructive occupation. Blundell's mind was not so fine as his. It was the regulation English official mind, doggedly faithful of course, dying at its post if need be, but to the keen American a little . . . well, tiresome, like the war.

"You're summing us all up, Horace Dimock," came Aileen's light voice. "Confess! You're thinking the old England is done for, and that your country is to lead the world."

"If you can mind-read, Madame, I can too. You would like to say, my 'vulgar country.' "

"So far as wealth means vulgarity," Aileen retorted, "I suppose I should. Peter Norton says

the world's banker will be New York, and not London. Can you expect any Britisher to like that?"

"Is international friendliness to be measured in terms of exchange? I thought we had all brought a greater altruism out of the war than that!" Horace knew his own remark to be sound, not sense. For was he not himself astutely preparing to make another fortune as soon as ever English sterling dropped to half its present value in New York dollars? Or even to two thirds?

"It was a dear little dinner," Crystal wrote later to Merton, who was her favourite nephew, "like all your Mater's dinners—comfy talk and good food. But a curious bewilderment hung over all of us. We've lived up so long to high standards, concrete ones that we were all able to grasp, that now everything, even an ideal, seems vague. We all *wish* to grasp the bigger issue; and not one of us, I include even brilliant minds like Mr. Dyfed's and Mr. Norton's, not one of us knows exactly what it is. Most of all is the English-American situation in a fog. Come home soon, you and Hazleby, to lighten it a little, especially

"For your devoted

"TANTE CRYSTAL."

CHAPTER XI

DAPHNE AGAIN

Crystal returned next day to the Pond House as she had promised. Horace put her into her train at Paddington, but as he stood by the window, waiting for her departure, she noticed that he did not lift his eyes to hers. He was to follow her in a few days, he protested re-assuringly, looking more handsome than ever in his dark blue, the straw hat over his fine brow. But he did not look up. Some instinct told Crystal not to go; above all, to keep Horace within reach, but she scorned herself for this. And, "Crystal's way," as Katty said, disdained to lift a finger to her own profit.

Walking away from the huge, grimy station, Horace let himself believe that a sudden impulse made him hail a taxi, and give the direction of that remote cloister in the wide mean street. But he had really planned it all day.

Sister Martina remembered him with obvious pleasure. She would ask Reverend Mother at once if he might see Sister Mary of the Incarnation. It was of course customary to write in advance when one visited there, but as he was going away it might be arranged.

In a few moments he found himself in the little

room standing nervously by the grill. Daphne did not keep him waiting, but she said at once, "Horace! It must be something serious brings you here?"

She had paused at the door as she said it, and as he did not answer came toward the grill slowly, her beautiful eyes full of concern.

He remained silent. What indeed could he say? How account for his presence there? How retain any dignity in her estimation?

"Horace! Has anything dreadful happened?"

"No." He found voice at last. "Nothing has happened, except to me. The incredible has happened to me, Daphne."

"The incredible? Do you mean . . . a miracle? Do you mean . . . O Horace!" She came close to the grill.

"My God! can you guess, Daphne?"

The girl drew back, the light dying from her face. "I've guessed wrong, I fear. I thought for a moment you meant you had got back your faith."

"My faith?" Horace nearly shouted. "My faith! No, my girl. Listen to me. I'm in love with you. I've fallen in love with a holy nun!"

Daphne stood absolutely still, her hands by her side, her widely opened eyes fixed upon him.

"They're more like mountain lakes than ever," Horace said aloud, unconscious that he was speaking. "Blue and clear as mountain lakes. No, blue and green and clear. Do you know that you're beautiful, Daphne? Do you know that your eyes

are like mountain lakes?" He knew now that he was speaking aloud, and waited for an answer.

A slight movement of her head as though life came back to it was the only response.

"Do you understand me? I'm in love with you. It's out of a clear sky. I've loved many times before. Does that shock you, my dear? But this is like nothing else. It's a kind of divine madness. Is that because I love a holy nun?"

At the word nun she shuddered. "God forgive you," she said. And paused, as though she meditated flight, but could not move. "No. God forgive me. It must be my fault . . . my sin. If I were a real nun this couldn't have happened. If I had the true vocation . . ."

"You're not a nun yet," he said almost roughly. "You haven't the vocation. Your vocation is love. Otherwise how could you have made me like this . . . mad, crazy, at my age, at this time? But, Daphne, while you still can, come out into the world . . . leave this back water . . . leave your Middle Ages for real life, even if you won't leave for me!"

"Leave!" said Daphne, with a sudden haughtiness. "I shall never leave, Uncle Horace. You are either mad or ill. You are certainly not yourself. If ever I was in doubt as to my vocation, now I know that I belong here. Now I know what this place means to me . . . safety from the horrors outside."

"Am I one of the horrors?" Even in his desperation Horace had to smile a little.

"It's all horrible, compared to this. It's all wrong

outside. Only here is there peace, and beauty, and height and depth. And even here . . ." (a puzzled look crossed her face). "How came you here, alone? Where is Sister Martina?"

"She was called to the entrance just as I came up. She'll be back in a moment. I'll go, Daphne. Not for the whole of creation would I distress you. But, Daphne . . . will you not give me one word before I go?"

Even at this unnatural and intense moment he was amused to observe how masterfully she took charge of the situation. His little Daphne . . . "She'll be Superior of her Order" . . . was it Katty said that?

"This is so unprecedented I can't imagine what one ought to do. I can only trust you, Uncle Horace, not to repeat it." (She might be forty, he twenty.) "It humiliates me, quite aside from my position as a postulant here, to see you . . . whom I've always looked up to . . . so, so unlike yourself." She paused, listening. "I hear dear Sister Martina. Good-bye, Uncle Horace, for always. Always."

"No," said Horace, in a deep voice, "it is not for always." But as the door knob turned, heralding Sister Martina, he had the presence of mind to step forward as though he were leaving.

The little old Sister was out of breath and apologetic. "I was kept at the door," she explained. But Horace hastily shook her hand and begged her to let him go down without her. This must have been against the rules, for he heard her as he

hurried away, following him with her slow, shuffling step.

Horace walked the length of the street he so disliked, without realising it, and on through other streets till he turned into the Bayswater Road, and so, after a while, into Kensington Gardens. His prevailing sensation was astonishment at himself. . . . To be, at his age, still capable of so overwhelming an emotion! To have fallen in love, as he had said to Daphne, with a holy nun! with a child, half his years, with Leonora's daughter, with a young creature he had almost disliked. . . . Astounding! Was he, then, himself, phenomenally young, to be capable of this? He, Horace, bound to Crystal?

Crystal!

It was characteristic of Horace that he had let no thought of Crystal obtrude itself till now. He had been conscious, he told himself, of her surprised eyes and her tall white figure . . . but only dimly so, in the background of this absorbing, this enthralling experience. But now she came forward. It was almost as though she stood there under the trees. Curiously, he was looking, from where he had thrown himself onto a Park chair, straight at two elms, which might have been the very two by the garden wall of Pond House. And Crystal seemed to stand there, reproaching him silently, as would be Crystal's way.

He could not think of her as voluble, even under such provocation as this would be. For, be it to

Horace's credit or discredit, he never for a moment thought of concealing his new experience from the woman who loved him. Was it some inherent honesty, or was it what Katty called "the clamourous inclination to a mirror" to see yourself, in other eyes, as it were? He certainly did not wish to see himself in Katty's, tolerant as he knew her to be, but he must lose no time in telling Crystal.

He felt that full confession in a way entitled him to absolution. He would put it all so frankly, so finely, that, hurt as she would be, she would admire his nobility in telling her. Yet the idea of her suffering tortured him . . . and hardly let him dwell more than a moment at a time on the delicious consciousness of knowing himself capable of falling in love once more. At forty-six, to experience the joys, the pangs, the exaltations of that wonderful sensation, complete absorption in a lovely woman! as complete as though one were twenty!

There was a further charm in the fact that Daphne had not responded. It was one of Horace's theories that love was as much a matter of response as of emotion. He had always been sure of a prompt return when he had heretofore bestowed his affection, young or middle-aged, but here in his most fatuous retrospect, he could not claim the hint of a response. Yet his own sensation was as tremendous as sensation could be. His altruism pleased Horace. It convinced him that his mental horizons were unbounded. There should be no limits to a man's experience, to the experience of a rounded personality, at any rate.

But Crystal.

How far would he fall in Crystal's estimation? Would she understand that this adventure was not of his seeking, had been thrust upon him, indeed? . . . so that he was not to be blamed . . . rather to be . . . he could not say envied, to Crystal . . . he must say . . . pitied. And he would assure her it in no way affected his profound devotion to herself. To be sure he had never loved two women successfully at the same time before. But this again was a new departure. Only, would Crystal believe in the possibility of a man's doing so? Women were hard to convince when their emotions were concerned, to convince of anything, that is, beyond primitive assertions.

How should he put it to her? Should he go down at once, and that very evening when it was lovely and still in the garden, Crystal resting her beautiful head on his shoulder, should he tell her then? No. Something in him revolted. If it hurt her too much, he would give in. He knew himself. He would swear never to see or think of Daphne again.

No, he would write. He would put it honestly before her. She should decide everything. It was quite on the cards that she would refuse to see him again. In any event, he must sail in three weeks for Buenos Aires . . . sooner if this Fiume disturbance meant new *"Bovo"* contracts. He would cable out there now, and then he would give up the evening, the night if need be, to his letter to Crystal.

He walked on to his hotel, pausing to buy the

evening papers. His own problems were so engrossing that all else took a second place. Russia . . . what horrors! This extraordinary England not yet announcing her way . . . And the Adriatic *impasse*. A century of events crowded into a day.

It was all on the knees of the gods. Italy, Ireland, Russia. He remembered that Serbia must also be included. What had Katty's young Dakovich written? "The angry gods gather once more to our undoing." Did he love Lady Freke, that handsome boy? No. She was twice his age. Absurd . . . yet he was twice Daphne's. An unwelcome picture of Daphne's lovely head, by Stefan's even more beautiful one, formed itself for a moment in his mind . . . were the "angry gods" jeering at him? As indeed they must be in that moment, at the whole world.

CHAPTER XII

CRYSTAL

KATTY telegraphed her sister next morning that she was in dire need of help . . . her Flemish Hostel short handed, and complications at Rijsdijk, the Holland end of the work. Could Crystal come to town for a few days?

Telegram in hand . . . at moments like this one did not bless the absence of a telephone as one did at other times . . . the lady of the Pond House walked up and down her orchard paths. She hated to leave this peaceful Oxfordshire even for two days. And perhaps Katty's telegram meant that one of them must cross to Holland. That wouldn't be so bad. She loved her Holland, darling little country!

She and Katty, Daphne with them, had once spent a summer in an unspoiled little village near Dordrecht. Katty, who did everything easily, had learned Dutch as a joke. Daphne, as serious as Katty was not, had learned it too, far more correctly, but with none of Katty's lively volubility. That knowledge had been invaluable during the war, when Katty had volunteered her services as Flemish interpreter (Dutch and Flemish being practically the same), and afterwards, when she had es-

tablished a Flemish Hostel for the housing of such unfortunates as could not return to Flanders. Daphne had assisted her till her convent life began. Crystal had helped with the French speaking refugees.

Thus it happened that Crystal left before the post was in, and so missed Horace's letter. Her surmise was right, Katty had gone unexpectedly to Holland. There was much to do at the Hostel, where Crystal's sense of mothering, of hospitality, of generosity always rose in a flood that Katty said would pauperise the American continent if ever it reached there. And having restored the regular workings of the place she returned to the Pond House.

It had seemed curious to get no word from Horace. Of course she had telephoned to his hotel, to learn that Mr. Dimock had been called unexpectedly to Paris . . . "a three days' trip on business," the clerk informed her. But of course she would find letters from him at the Pond House, and went down on the late train Saturday evening.

The little house under its gigantic trees was dark except for a tiny night light in the low square hall. Yes, there lay Horace's letter by the light; the beloved handwriting was like a tender welcome. She would have a look at the children first, slip into a dressing gown, and then on the couch in the cosy drawing room where he had lain so many wonderful evenings while she read to him, she would enjoy his letter, evidently a long, full one, in delicious comfort.

She lighted the big softly shaded oil lamp . . .

no electricity at Sallum Prior! . . . and went up to change. It was a little disconcerting to find Bobby in her bed, and Mr. Honey in Bobby's, close beside. A paper pinned to his pillow above Bobby's rosy little countenance was evidently Bedelia's contribution:

"Darling Mummie Bobby was homsik for yu so I invitud Mistr Hony bekors I cudent lend Obydyer or Amoony or FinMikool We sed ower prayrs."

In Miss McClinton's room "FinMikool" reposed heavily upon his small mistress's feet; "A. Moony" was well under the bedclothes, although a furry paw rested on Bedelia's chin; while "Obydyer," the only lively one, scratched about in the wash basin, whence was no convenient egress.

Crystal, shading the candle she carried so that her little daughter's slumbers would not be disturbed, reflected that it would never do to let Horace behold that miniature Zoo. It was just one of those things Horace would not understand.

Crossing to Horace's empty room, she blew out her candle and leaned awhile on the wide old sill of the open window, looking over the dark garden toward the village roofs, and on to that huge mass of elms against the starry sky. Around her all her dear one's things, at her hand the books he kept for wakeful hours, against her heart his unread letter. Was it possible there was anything but happiness in the world? Could evil ever pass here, under those peaceful Chilterns? She drew in a long breath of

the soft night air, fragrant with the honeysuckle under his window . . . and turning reluctantly from the dark beauty of the night, she groped to the bed to leave a kiss on the pillow where his head had so lately rested. And so out, down the narrow stairs and into the lighted room below.

How many times she was to recall the tranquillity of that moment!

CHAPTER XIII

HORACE'S LETTER

"London, August 5, 1919.

"What will you say to me when you have read what I write here? What will you think of me? There is no term of opprobrium too bitter, no name too base, to apply to me. And yet, I swear to you, I am not intentionally guilty.

"I do not need to affirm again my affection for you. It has been tried, under severe conditions, these past four years. I can honestly say to you, my dear girl, that it has never wavered, never altered. For the longest period in my life I have remained constant to one ideal. You have in return given me everything that makes life worth living. My gratitude to you has been as great as my love. And believe me or not, that gratitude will last as long as I live. But you will never believe that my love will last also. I suppose I shall never be able to prove it to you.

"All this time I am avoiding the main issue. You will not wonder at my cowardice when I come to it.

"Do you remember my promising to tell you what was troubling me in my first days at Pond House? I hadn't the courage then. Besides, it seemed likely that it would not be necessary. I believed I had put it behind me, but I deceived myself.

"Just before I saw you at that time I passed through an experience that was almost incredible. I was taken

absolutely unawares, swept off my feet by a storm of emotion . . . I can call it nothing else. 'Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.' If I am marked for destruction the madness is comprehensible . . . and to see my life upset, my future, our future, shattered . . . my place in your esteem forfeited . . . this will be destruction. The madness is otherwise incomprehensible. Why should I, a happy man, satisfied and proud in your affection, asking nothing but its continuance, why should I be struck by madness?

"You will have guessed by now what form it has taken.

"I have encountered a human being who, without warning, dominates my life. She is stronger than I am. She has given me no word of encouragement; she knows I love her; but it is more than possible I shall never see her again. Yet I am sure it is right to tell you this. I could not return to you with this on my heart and conscience. I am distraught . . . I can neither sleep nor rest.

"I shall go to Paris for three days . . . to escape from myself. I cannot write again till I know where I stand in your eyes. It is useless to say I love you. . . . You will despise me for venturing to think I can love two women at once. Yet as God is my judge, I can. You will always remain the dearest being in the world to me, except for that one other. Pour out your anger, your disgust, upon me. You can say nothing of me that I have not said myself.

"HORACE."

Crystal had read to the end without moving, as one watches a catastrophe before one's eyes, unable

to arrest it. Her breath stopped suddenly, for a perceptible period. What had happened? Had some one killed her? "An experience that was almost incredible." Where had she read that? She looked down at the letter.

Yes, Horace had written that. Had Horace killed her? Did he mean to? Did he know what he was doing? Incredible! That was the only word. She began to breathe again . . . evenly, quietly, like a person who is alive, but unconsciously so. Her eyes turned from the great globe of yellow lamp-light to the darkness of the long window which stood open to the garden. There was Horace's chair on the grass. And Horace would never sit in it again. He was in Paris . . . he would soon go to the Argentine. He would never come again to that walled-in garden. He would never lift his eyes from there to the Chilterns.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills," said Crystal, "from whence cometh my help" . . . and without knowing what she said or did she rose unsteadily, walking to the long window. It was too dark to see the Chilterns, and, still in a dream, she passed through the garden and out into the road.

Incredible. That was what they said when the Germans invaded Belgium. It was incredible that any race of men should do so dastardly a thing. Was Horace a German? Was Horace dastardly? Absurd word for her gallant beloved one. Crystal smiled in the darkness. She must have had a moment of delirium.

But the letter, which she held tightly all this time,

had said "an experience that was almost incredible." She saw the words even in the dark. She could almost repeat the whole letter. "What will you say to me when you have read what I write here? What will you think of me?" She spoke it aloud, quite distinctly, pausing on the Hill Road, and looking over the midnight fields. "There is no term of opprobrium too bitter . . . no name too base to apply to me."

Was this all true of Horace? Horace? He said it was. Did he understand what he was saying? Did he think love was like that? Something you could throw off and take on? Something you could change as you changed an old coat? The love between her and Horace was a reality . . . something tangibly existent, alive, a soul, a spirit. . . . Was he trying to strangle it, as horrible people in the newspapers strangled an unwanted child? You could not murder a spirit . . . it went on forever.

But he claimed he loved her still . . . only that there was one he loved better. Crystal dismissed this as being words, words without meaning. Love was general, to be sure . . . you loved the whole world, but as a result of loving the one particular person . . . no, not as a result, as an accompaniment. But the love for that one . . . that was the completion, the rapture, the reason of existence. Could it be he had not really loved her after all? That this new feeling was the real thing? No, she was sure of the affection he had given her . . . it had been wonderful, superb, without reservation. Of course she had only Alexander's devotion to

compare it with. . . . Would another woman know better? Would Katty, for instance? Katty had been loved so often . . . three husbands . . . and she could not remember when some man or boy wasn't sighing his soul out for Katty. Did any of them offer a completer devotion than Horace's? Could anything in the world seem more genuine than his?

No, it was shipwreck, pure and simple. Some engulfing sea she could not understand, that Horace perhaps could not understand, had swept her down, had swept down her hopes, had swept down . . . must she also believe, Horace's honour?

Only the pain of it till now had engrossed her. She had walked on, unconsciously holding her hand against her heart. She recalled an illness she had had as a child, when her heart had hurt like this, and the doctors had said she must be careful, always. To think Horace . . . Horace, should give her this pain . . . that it should be his hand that stabbed her in the heart!

She looked over the country he had so loved . . . this land of which she had been a part, perhaps always, through her forbears . . . he had said he loved it next to her . . . now he had proved traitor to Oxfordshire as to her.

Suddenly a burning, scorching blush rushed into her face. She forgot the pain, realising in a flash what affront had been put upon her. She hadn't known till then that she was proud . . . proud as the devil in hell . . . she said aloud, in a kind of astounded wonder at herself . . . proud as the

greatest devil, proud as Lucifer, the very devil who had defied God. . . .

If Horace were there at that moment she would kill him. She looked at her long white hands . . . could they strangle him? Strangle was an ugly word that seemed to haunt her . . . but at that moment she knew she could . . . and would . . . she, Crystal, tall and proud and angry. She saw herself, for perhaps the first time in her life; knew herself too beautiful, too tall and proud, to affront like that.

She was still walking. The road had become a steep climb. The sharp pain came back in her side. She discovered that she was out of breath. And the dawn, the early dawn of August, would soon be over her Chilterns.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SISTERS

"THERE is a first time for everything, in this world, isn't there, Grimmer?" said Lady Freke as she stood on her low steps in the early morning waiting for Grimmer to call a taxi.

"Your ladyship means . . . ?" suggested the large one, blandly.

"I mean I'm tired. For the first time I want to live in a new Heaven, on a new earth."

"You'll be too busy, my lady, to take much notice," encouraged Grimmer. "Here is the taxi, your ladyship."

"Grimmer, we've been through a lot together. If I should lose you now, I'd close the house and live in a plane tree over in the Square."

"Your ladyship is very kind, but I see no immediate danger," her domestic Colossus cheered her as he put her into the taxi.

"*Thim above* may know," said Lady Freke, resignedly. "But I doubt it. Here I stand to pass another year without Blundell. My boys, for all the war is done with, still go in daily peril of their lives. If Francis Morrill is right, and the Adriatic kettle likely to boil over, Grimmer, with all my other blessings, may yet be pried out of Cadogan

Square. And Crystal? Why do I know so little just now of Crystal?"

She thought of her beautiful sister as she drove eastward. Something was wrong there. She wished she could get to the bottom of it. She saw her of course at the Hostel, but the work there was so strenuous, Crystal's tranquil generous help in such demand, that there had been no time to talk. Crystal had left town immediately after that little dinner for Horace, Katty reflected. . . . Katty herself had had no time to run down to Sallum Prior. She had also to remind herself that even if she had had the time, she had not had the invitation.

"Look for the man," said Lady Freke dryly. "*Cherchez la femme*" was a misleader. Of course the man was Horace . . . but just how much red pepper *was* there in the pickle jar? She had never understood that affair. . . . Horace had gone suddenly back to his *Bovo* in the Argentine. One of his charming notes had surprised her with the word of his leaving three weeks sooner than he had planned. And Crystal looked like death . . . Oh that more of us could play death so handsomely! thought an unenvious sister. Crystal with her head high and her lovely colour gone . . . but magnificent. They called her the white lady—"het witte dame"—when she went amongst the Flemings. . . . One had never thought of her as the White Lady, despite her unfailing wear of white, because her rosy colour had given her such radiance. Now that colour was absent. . . .

Yet their relation, Horace and Crystal's, had not seemed more than a peaceful intimacy between old friends. He had been in love with her, of course, in those Glenmalure days, but Katty remembered with some self-reproach that she had herself been so absorbed in her own affair . . . her engagement and marriage to dear old Blundell . . . that she had not been so observant as usual. Had Crystal perhaps been in love with Horace at this time? She should have remembered that a man, and as attractive a man as Horace, who hung about constantly, was not likely to be the trifle to Crystal that he would be to her.

But there was little time to think of family affairs.

Most of Katty's War Committees had come naturally to an end. But her Flemish Hostel claimed all her time. It was of course not like those days when the 250,000 refugees landed upon the kindly English shores, and when, in the lack of preparation, only individual good will and eagerness made the grim and sordid avalanche of human misery manageable at all. Into those first days were concentrated the agonies and humours of a life time. Working untiringly, lightly, all the four years of the war, only some resiliency in Katty . . . she called it her callousness . . . kept her gay. Here and there a face, a type, came out of the crowd, with its individual appeal, but mostly it was a surge of humanity toward her desk, that asked unending questions, in French or Flemish, and surged on, to be taken care of as best might be. But that sore

time was over. Most of the refugees had gone back to Belgium. Katty's Hostel meant asylum, not transfer, for her Flemings, maimed, sick, or sad, who could not return to their own homes.

It was like the "Howard girls" to keep up their war work long after other workers wearied. And, as Katty had at last confessed to Grimmer, she was wearying too. Accordingly, she rejoiced with more than the satisfaction of even the most devoted sister, to see Crystal appear that very morning, coming across the grey dusty floor, where unexpected sunlight broke in as she entered. A man followed with a suit case which he set down by Lady Freke's desk.

"You're as glorious as the Second Coming!" Katty said joyfully, carrying Crystal's hand to her own cheek. Katty never kissed . . . "except my various husbands," she had once said. But she now stood holding her tall sister's white, loosely gloved hand and looking keenly into the beautiful pale face.

Yes, Crystal had suffered. There were lines of some deep unrest beneath that lovely tranquillity.

"Nothing counts, really," Katty said aloud, "in the face of this"—pointing to a group of her Flemings, "even now. All the sorrows we have any of us even thought we had, pale into insignificance. These tragedies of Belgium, Russia, Serbia, have changed the world. I mean one's own world of feeling, of emotion. I can't think of anything now that would have the right to upset me."

Katty studied her sister as she spoke. Crystal regarded her steadily in return, but with a look in her great eyes Katty could not bear.

"Do you mean, little sister," Crystal asked gently, "that you would have been philosophical if Blundell, or one of your boys, had been killed in our hideous war?"

Katty caught her breath. "'Tisn't what one would have been, 'tis simply what one must be. The sense of proportion has altered for us all. I'd feel I had no longer the right to suffer, if Blundell . . . if Merton . . . or" (here she really set her teeth together) "or Hazleby were killed."

And remembering Alicia's surprising "or Hazleby," she asked if the girl were still at the Pond House?

"No. And she's going out to Belgrade in a week. She's been fitting herself to drive an ambulance, to nurse, to cook—astonishing little Alicia! I think some talk she had with your Serbian officers decided her."

"Then my boys will miss her. They arrive next week." And Katty pulled out a telegram for her sister to read.

"Oh, Katty!" beamed Crystal. "This is the first bright spot in many moons. 'Merton, Hazleby sailing twentieth.' But oh, my dear! what a disappointment! Blundell is going to wait at Basra!"

"He is," answered her sister, with a tiny quiver of the lip. "He can still be useful out there. I know what he's thinking, bless him!"

"But at least you'll have the boys."

"For how long? They're coming home on a month's leave. But if I know them, they'll be off again; Hazleby, anyway."

And Katty looked over at her Flemings. "I'll have a chance to see if my philosophy is sound, Crystal."

"You are a plucky little sister," Crystal smiled through tears at her elder.

She had hardly spoken when a family group was steered in their direction—two men, a girl, a mother with a baby, several children, and an elderly woman with an uncompromising expression. They all smiled in response to Lady Freke's cheery greeting, except the uncompromising one, who said, "Mmf! Hollandsch!"

"Yes," agreed Katty, "I learned your Flemish in Holland; that is why I talk like that."

"Madame can talk good Flemish," said one of the men reprovingly to the old woman; and as Crystal at that moment produced various cakes from her bag for the children, and the elders not disdaining them, at once instituted a feast, the man drew Lady Freke aside. He looked about in an anxious manner, particularly in the old woman's direction, and then began in his guttural Flemish:

"You see, Madame, the English have been very kind to us—it's a wonder, how good they are—and they gave us a little house, and plenty to eat, and good clothes for the children; 'tis a wonder, Madame, finding any people so good—but I cannot explain to them. . . ."

"Come over here,"' said Lady Freke—thinking state secrets at least would now be revealed. "Here you can speak freely."

"Madame is good—it is the aunt. . . ."

"The aunt? Your aunt?"

"No, Madame—the aunt of my wife's mother—she is there, the old woman—O Madame, you English can do anything, if only you will understand! Tell me how to lose the aunt!"

"You've asked me everything, you funny Flemish people," responded Lady Freke, "but never, never, have I been asked to get rid of anyone's aunt! . . . And I'm not English . . . although you are quite right . . . they can do anything, those English, if only you can make them understand!"

"Ah, then Madame *is* from Holland?"

"No, from America."

The man's face lighted up. "This is the first time I see an American. Often do I see the American flag, and my people, we take off our hats, and the tears come in our eyes . . . it is true, Madame, when we see that flag . . . but an American lady . . . just like others . . . and you can understand me!"

Katty laughed. . . . "I don't understand about the aunt;" . . . but in a few moments it was arranged to the man's satisfaction. The aunt should go to a home offered by kind people near London, where she should have a room of her own, and good food. And the man was to take his family back to Belgium.

"This is Lady Freke?" came an insistent Scotch voice. "I'll take an orphan to Glasgow. . . . I'll give her a good home."

"Dear Madam, there are no orphans! Or rather,

every orphan has at least one or two parents, and several uncles and aunts. I never knew orphans could have so many relatives!"

Scotland regarded America with distrust. "There must be orphans, children without father or mother, it stands to reason," she said severely.

"This is not the age . . . or place . . . of reason," responded flippant America. "I can give you any amount of orphans if you'll take their parents. But they won't be separated. Family feeling is a great asset with our Belgians, except . . . candour compels me to add . . . in the case of aunts. Possibly you would take an aunt? Aunts are sometimes orphans."

"I have come all the way from Glasgow to offer hospitality to an orphan," said her interlocutor formidably . . . "a young orphan. I do not wish to take anyone else."

Katty, unabashed, led the lady to a distant desk to prosecute further enquiries and returned gaily to Crystal.

A huge man, with the dignity and picturesqueness of a Spanish grandee, was talking easily to the lovely Mrs. McClinton. He spoke excellent French, and explained, with some humour, that he had only one suit of clothes. . . . Alas, he had no money either, and although he had been to the clothes department of their hospitable "Hostel" he was many sizes too large for anything there.

"Of course . . . the very thing . . ." Lady Freke cordially assured him . . . "you are just my husband's size. He is away, but I know there are

lots of things he'd be enchanted to think a Belgian gentleman was wearing."

Monsieur Theysskens' eyes filled, as he murmured his appreciation. Crystal could not bear to look at him. Imagine Blundell, or Peter Norton, or . . . Horace . . . in such a predicament, she said to herself, as Katty took his address, promising to send the things that evening.

"And, Monsieur," said her ladyship, with some malice, "your countrymen so far have refused, one and all, to accept pyjamas. Yet I've a beautiful box of them, sent by the kindest woman in Boston. Don't tell me you also prefer the old fashioned night shirt?"

But it was exactly there that Monsieur Theysskens drew the line. He would not wear pyjamas. "It is not our custom, Madame . . . and to be quite frank, that garment seems to me an absurdity . . . for a promenade in hot weather, perhaps. . . . I can conceive of its being used . . . but to repose in . . . never, Madame!"

Crystal had walked away toward the table where the "tartines" were served, with a small fat hot hand in hers, the grubby little owners of some other equally uninviting paws following at her heels. She came suddenly on the pathetic figure of a young girl, her blonde head bowed in red hands, as she tried to hide her sobbing fit.

"It's the first time I've seen tears here!" said one of the two English members of Katty's Committee,

"they are generally so brave! but we can't find out if she's French or Flemish."

"Shall I call Lady Freke?" asked Crystal. "I think the child is Flemish. She looks like something in a Terbourg picture."

"Yes, please . . . please!"

Katty was found, and, motioning the others away, sat down by the weeping girl.

"You're Flemish, I can see," she said softly. "Now be good and sweet, and tell me where you come from."

"Alost," sobbed the girl. "O Madame! I understand nothing . . . but I have lost my mother, and my father, and my two brothers . . . and I am frightened."

In a few moments Katty had the story.

Simonne van den Poel was seventeen. She was the only daughter and took care of her mother who was very, very ill. They had all fled from Alost in the early days of the war, to a strange village, where her fathers and brothers had been forced to leave them to work in Germany. Her mother grew worse and worse . . . and when the war was over, and the men returned ("so thin, Madame, you could see their bones!") there was no home in Alost, and they heard how good it was in England. So they walked many many days to the sea, and it was she, Simonne, who drew the little cart in which they put her mother. "For men do not know how to care for a sick woman, Madame," said poor little Simonne, lifting her blue eyes at last.

And when they reached the sea there was a boat

to bring them all to England, where they would find work and much money.

But the van den Poel family must wait to go on last, because of the little cart. And then her father and brothers thought she was tired, and said they would put it on. So she, Simonne, went on to the boat first . . . and O Madame, they pulled her on so quickly, those strange Englishers, that when she looked around for her mother it was all confused, but the boat had started. There stood her father and brothers beside the little cart on the land . . . and she, Simonne, alone on the water! . . . in that great boat, being taken away from them. She had tried to jump off . . . but someone held her, and her father called loudly "Simonne! wait in England! We will come!"

But this England was so huge, how would they find her? She had not seen one person she knew . . . not one, Madame! nor had she understood one word anyone had spoken to her.

"But you understand me?"

"Oh, yes . . . though it was not the way they spoke in Alost!"

"Now, my girl," explained Lady Freke slowly and clearly, "you are going to be very brave. Tonight you shall come home with me, so that we can talk about your family and the best way to send them a letter. When did you have something to eat?"

"This morning. I did not think I would ever eat again . . . but now, O Madame, I am so hungry!" and the tears fell once more.

So Katty took her to Crystal, who could be relied

upon to find her the hottest soup, the strongest coffee, the most inviting "tartines," and herself hastened to register the poor waif, and to arrange for her temporary domicile with her. Crystal was to stay the night in Cadogan Square, so there was no hurry.

An hour later the big place was practically empty. Felton the janitor appeared from some unknown hiding place . . . a night bird was Felton, gaunt and hawk eyed, sleeping most of the day, and doing his heavy work between the Flemings' departure at night and their re-appearance next morning.

He was followed by two cats not more silent than himself, and Lady Freke paused long enough by Simonne, now happily eating unlimited "tartines," to explain that the cats helped Felton sweep and clean and that he in return helped them catch mice.

Simonne's first smile appeared on her round little countenance, which, now that Crystal had superintended a washing and general tidying, was discovered to be very pretty.

The long day had passed like others.

While Katty wrote up the day's report of her various "cases" . . . it was always droll to find Katty businesslike! Simonne made friends with Felton's cats, and Crystal walked about in the echoing emptiness.

It grew steadily darker. The bare room lost its uncompromising lines. Shadows hid the unlovely chairs and settees. At one end of the long place, where Felton was cleaning, burned a few lights.

At the other end a clear green shade, over the electric lamp on Katty's desk, shone on her foolish white hair. Between them, these two extremes of devoted labour, reflected Crystal, stretched the long grey boards on which the human tragedy that day had walked.

She recalled one little lame Belgian lady who had said repeatedly in her fine thin voice, "C'est incroyable, Madame. C'est tout. C'est incroyable!"

That was a better word than the "incredible" the English had used at first. *Incroyable!* And Crystal thought of her midnight walk with Horace's letter in her hand. She had written him . . . how long an answer! calling on him to deny it all, to return to her. And receiving a desperate reply, a telegram, with no hope of comfort in it, had sent him a second letter, bitter and astonished. She wished now she had sent no letter at all, but one word, once only, *"Incroyable!"*

Yet what was her anguish to the anguish of a nation? She seemed to see the forlorn figures of the last four years passing in the gloom, no tears anywhere except Simonne's.

And there passed also those others, who had escaped . . . for how long? those tall men of Katty's . . . the beloved Blundell and the two gallant American boys; Peter Norton white as death, with the colossal task of guiding his army of readers, Peter who had let his older daughter go with her ambulance into the firing line and who would now perhaps lose the younger . . . and, curiously vivid for her short acquaintance with

them, the two Serbians. What was it Katty had said of Stefan? "If tragedy overhangs that boy!" Of course tragedy hung over him. Had anyone come through the war without knowing that all beauty was predestined to destruction? beauty of cathedral towns, of age-old books, . . . beauty of the spirit, of the human relationship . . . most of all, beauty of youth.

Stefan's dark eyes looked at her in her reverie and, through them, looked Serbia. Her heart cried out for him, for Serbia, for Belgium, for her little sister, so gay, so smiling, in the face of what they had all been through, of what perhaps even now lay before them.

The illimitable courage of the world!

Only Horace had failed. Horace and the Germans. Every other individual, every other race, had rung true. She knew that if a sword struck the steel in Blundell, in Merton or Hazleby, in Peter Norton, in wild Boyovich, in tall and silent Stefan, it would ring hard and true. In Horace was no steel . . . only padding . . . charm, cleverness, fine appreciations, success, noble intentions . . . all padding, no steel there.

England had rung true . . . Ireland, despite Sinn Fein . . . Belgium, France, Serbia . . . but Germany had responded like . . . like a bag of filings, iron filings, to be sure, "blood and iron" . . . greed, lust, envy, brutality. . . . Crystal smiled in the dark at her own mixture of metaphor. But she said aloud . . . "No, Germany has never rung true." And found herself suddenly pausing in her

walk to say, "My own country rang truest of them all!"

Yet Horace, representative American as he was, had failed. Had other Americans failed too? Merton's and Hazleby's indignant young voices seemed to answer her: "Tante Crystal! Shame. Our country rang as though God Himself had struck the steel!"

CHAPTER XV

ALOST AND BRUXELLES

"WEELUM JAWGE!" demanded Bobby with severity. "Do you know what is ve refugees?"

"Yeh," said Mr. Honey.

"You think they're Farmer Giles' new mowing-machines, don't you, Mr. Honey?" Bedelia enquired from an unsuspected perch in the plum tree over them.

"Yeh," assented Mr. Honey, relieved.

"Now, Weelum Jawge, you don't . . . you know ve refugees is alive."

"Yeh"; Mr. Honey considered it carefully.

"You think they're a new kind of white rats, don't you, Mr. Honey?" pursued Miss McClinton.

"Yeh," responded Mr. Honey, now sure of his facts.

"Weelum Jawge!" remonstrated his friend. "Ve refugees is ve poor peoples wiv all ve bad Germans chasing vem."

"He means Belgees," vouchsafed Miss McClinton.

"Yeh!" agreed Mr. Honey, as one knowing it all along.

"Mummie is coming tonight wiv Belgees. . . . Oh, oceans of Belgees," proclaimed Bobby. "I shall

show vem my new mud guard. And, B'delia, you'll let vem play wiv Obadiah, won't you, B'delia?"

"Of course," said his sister. "Mummie says nothing in the whole world, or even in the Pond House, is too good for the refugees. I dare say Bobby will have to give them all his clothes and stay in bed while they wear them."

Bobby looked anxious.

"Will I have to give vem my mud guard, too? It's lucky my new bicycle bell is broken, isn't it, Weelum Jawge?"

"Yeh," said Mr. Honey, cheerfully.

"I believe they're coming now!" called Bedelia from her superior vantage point. "I can see Dicky the Driver's red chrysanthemum!"

And sure enough . . . in two minutes Bedelia and Bobby threw themselves rapturously into their mother's white cloaked embrace, and formal introductions followed as three other figures emerged from the fly. Crystal had brought down Simonne and two little boys.

"These are all Tante Katty's special friends," she said. "The boys don't speak English, so you must talk French with them, and Simonne has learned a little English at Tante Katty's, so I've promised you will teach her a lot more."

Simonne regarded her new surroundings with the stolidity of the peasant, but Henri and Maximilian de Wiart, more intimately known as Ri-Ri and Chou-Chou, evinced the liveliest interest.

Ri-Ri was a tall blonde boy of nine, with much gaiety and excellent manners. Chou-Chou was

small, practical and podgy. Both spoke delightful French.

"Their father and mother, Monsieur and Madame de Wiart, are glad to let us have the boys awhile," explained Crystal, first in English, then in French. "They have lived in Brussels all through the war." She did not explain that the poor proud Bruxellois had at last found themselves without money or endurance after the long German occupation. Katty had breezily arranged a home near Rijsdijk for the elders, and had whisked the small boys away.

"And poor Simonne can't see her family for some little time yet, so we must all make her happy and play we're her American family while she's waiting to go back to her Flemish one."

"I shall be her Tante Katty," said Bedelia, with firmness, screwing an imaginary monocle into her eye. "And Mr. Honey shall be Grimmer. Wouldn't you like to be a 'normous fat butler, Mr. Honey?"

Mr. Honey said "Yeh" rather doubtfully. The other gentlemen present agreed to be Simonne's uncles, and the party, having investigated the question of bedrooms, soon assembled joyfully in the blue and white kitchen. It was November now, too dark and cold for garden tea, and Crystal was glad. The lively group around the lighted tea table, the big fire roaring in the comfortable range, gave her the first happy moments she had had for many weeks.

"I find this the true country, Madame!" said

Ri-Ri. "I am enchanted to be here. Chou-Chou is too young."

"No, no, Madame, I am old enough!" protested the smaller Belgian.

"I hope you will all like it," smiled Crystal.

"Me, I find Chou-Chou too young," reaffirmed Ri-Ri. "And Simonne" (this in a cautious undertone), "Simonne is peasant, and perhaps sees too much country at home."

"We all like the unknown, I suppose, Monsieur," said his hostess, playing up to her small guest with some merriment, and thankful that no conventional eyes were there to disapprove of this delightful child.

Mr. Honey had been invited to tea, and Crystal looked around at the differing types with real interest . . . her own two unmistakable Americans, Simonne's Flemish peasant beauty, Ri-Ri's contrasting man-of-the-world type, also Flemish, although his small brother was of the unquestionable French-Belgian stamp, *petit bourgeois* at that . . . and Mr. Honey's English stolidity . . . but all six young faces beautiful in the lamp light.

Mrs. Rumbold and the little maids were asked in and solemnly presented to the strangers.

"It do fair give me a turn," said Mrs. Rumbold, "if you'll pardon the liberty, m'm, to be lookin' at real Belgiums . . . in the flesh, as you might say . . . only none too much flesh, there be n't. But we'll soon see to that, young sirs and miss!"

As the three looked at her uncomprehendingly, she said this all over again, very loudly. Crystal

explained it to the boys, and as she could not do the same for Simonne, stood holding the young girl's hand, and now and then patting her shoulder. Ri-Ri, as soon as he understood, shook hands with *Madame la Cuisinière,* as he called her, in quite the grand manner, so that Mrs. Rumbold said apart to her mistress:

"Easy to see the young gentleman be gentry, m'm. But we're havin' spinach for dinner, so you'll see for yourself, m'm."

Her keen eyes summed up Simonne meanwhile. But Katty had dressed the young creature charmingly, and Mrs. Rumbold was baffled. At dinner, Simonne, under Crystal's guidance, came down in a pale blue frock, also Katty's gift, with a blue ribbon around her fair hair. And it was easy to see that she liked spinach, so that Mrs. Rumbold, whose proudest boast it was that she could tell "gentry" unfailingly, reserved judgment.

Crystal kept the girl as much as possible at her side, as the lonely one in the curiously assorted party, and all the rest, children, servants, were urged to tell her the English for everything that happened.

"Simonne!" Bobby would shout. "Vis is ve door. Vis is Mr. Honey by ve door. Isn't it, Weelum Jawge?" and Mr. Honey would say, as loudly as his unaccustomed lungs permitted, "Yeh!"

"Mr. Honey says 'Yeh,' Simonne. Say it, Simonne!"

And Simonne would respond, "Mr. Honey say yeh, Simonne!" and Chou-Chou, little *bourgeois gentilhomme,* would follow Simonne conscientiously

about, repeating English words as fast as he himself acquired them.

Ri-Ri, that man of the world, was too much occupied with Bedelia and Obadiah, to whom he talked unceasingly in his gay sweet French, to bother with educational methods. And Bedelia, so austere, her mother smiled to herself, with Mr. Honey, and Bobby and Uncle Horace, turned a softening eye on this ingratiating blonde foreigner. Crystal rejoiced, like any proper mother, to hear her small daughter's well directed if peculiar essays in the French tongue. She told herself, with some of Katty's cynicism, that she feared she would sacrifice Ri-Ri's ever learning English to Bedelia's learning ever so little French.

After dinner Crystal started them all on the simple but lively game of "Up Jenkins!" a game in which language is the smallest part. And the polyglot enthusiasm that followed brought even the correct Mrs. Rumbold and the giggling little maids to the door to watch.

At eight, which was Bobby's bedtime, Mr. Honey reluctantly departed, and Bobby, even more reluctantly, said "Good night." It was hard to leave that fascinating table by the fire, where the "Belgees" and Bedelia were to play another long half hour. Crystal sat at her desk writing those business letters her work in town had so pushed aside, and forgot the noisy game behind her.

It was past the children's hour for bed when she looked up suddenly at the uncurtained window, and saw against the darkness of the garden a face so

near the top of the window it suggested an uncanny giant; a large face, under the hard line of what, to her momentary fancy, looked like a German helmet. She rose quickly and went to the window; the children, their attention drawn by her movement, looked in equal surprise at the dark menacing apparition. Ri-Ri, however, with a "Les Allemands, madame!" pushed himself between Crystal and the window, a very pale if gallant Ri-Ri.

"But there are no Germans here," laughed Crystal, a little weakly. "Open the door, please, Ri-Ri," she continued in French, and as Ri-Ri protested with all the fine Belgian heroism of nine . . . (he'd be the same at nineteen, Crystal found time to think) she herself opened the long French window.

"Oh, an English constable!" she laughed in relief.

"Aye, m'm," came the full Oxfordshire voice. "A'm Adam Woodly, coom to thank ee, m'm, for kindness to my old mother. Said yon soup you be sendin' her was only thing she kep on her stummick."

"Come in," said Crystal. "We thought you a German soldier in the dark. These are my Belgian friends, who will be very pleased to see a real English policeman, and to know you are looking out for us."

"Mummie!" came rapturously from the opposite door, where Bobby's small pyjamaed figure had surreptitiously appeared. "Can't I get ve policeman somefin to eat?"

"If the officer would like some bread and cheese . . . ?" hesitated Crystal, not quite understanding the etiquette of these occasions.

"Thank ee, m'm," responded Adam Woodly with prompt enthusiasm. "It be a long walk over Chilterns from next place!"

A thrilled assembly of small ones gazed up at the giant. Adam was certainly 6 foot 4 and weighty in proportion, but he now allowed himself to be led into the warm kitchen by the excited Bobby.

Here Miss McClinton took charge with her accustomed firmness. Adam was given the biggest chair at the table, and all the children hurried to draw up other seats. Crystal, smiling by the fire, directed her little daughter in the matter of bringing out cheese, bread, milk and cakes. There was evidently no limit to Adam Woodly's appetite, and soon each eager member of the entranced party, a half eaten ginger cake in a careless hand, gazed with round eyes at the hungry giant.

It was only when Bedelia's final search failed to reveal more food that Adam sadly desisted. As he rose ponderously from the now bare table Bobby seized one ham-like hand and Chou-Chou the other, looking up into the distant but benignant countenance with fond admiration.

"Come again, Mr. Officer!" said Bobby. "Mummie, you do feel proud to have a real officer come to tea or anyfing, don't you, Mummie?"

"Of course," said his mother hastily. "It was very kind of the officer to come. Say 'Good night' to him now, all of you. It is probable he has to go back to his beat."

"A'm goin' home to supper," said Adam cheerfully. "Many thanks to you, m'm, and to all the

young ladies and young gentlemen. A'll allus think on ye when Ar coom along over yon and it be dark and cold."

Bobby's invitation to future meals any time Adam "coom along over yon" was cut short by Mummie, who managed the giant's departure as expeditiously as possible. Then, gathering her small excited son in her arms, she called to the others to follow, and a happy party trooped up to bed.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HEART OF A NUN

Crystal looked at her pile of letters with the unfailing expectation of every morning, that one of them would be from Horace . . . and as every morning, only disappointment followed. There was a post card from Katty, that evader of letter writing.

"My boys arrive Wednesday. I count on you to dine and sleep here that night. Think you should see Daphne. A glorious letter from Stefan. Love. Katty."

Her sister's letters might as well be telegrams. Still, they did cover the ground . . . Katty's ground, Crystal thought whimsically. She wished she could interest herself as Katty did, passionately, absorbingly, in Serbia, in Irish politics, in anything. She wondered if Katty had ever suffered. Grief, yes . . . but humiliation? For humiliation, Crystal thought, is the only real suffering. "Ce n'est pas l'amour . . . c'est l'amour-propre." Who said that? Rochefoucauld? It was a petty if brilliant summing up . . . but agonisingly true. And when you joined to your bitterly wounded pride a curiosity even bitterer . . . was it not far worse than the pain of death?

She had walked out, and up her long bare orchard.

That other . . . the woman Horace had so suddenly loved, for whom he had so suddenly routed her, Crystal, from his heart . . . who, where, what, was she? Crystal was ashamed of her own burning eagerness to know. What difference did it make? And yet it seemed to her it would be the answer to everything . . . a clear understanding of the woman who could turn Horace into a traitor . . . that would answer all those questions that now consumed her.

If she could but see her once, that other woman . . . could once understand Horace's reasons . . . she could perhaps settle into comparative quiet. Now she knew herself desperately concerned with futility, with shame . . . knew herself eaten up by this curious feverish wildness . . . she could give it no better name. Was she failing physically, as well as in other ways? Her heart hurt her often now . . . sometimes she could not sleep for it . . . she who had always slept! and this restlessness! which drove her to constant effort, yet never healthily tired her. . . . If Horace had died, how happily, in comparison with this, could she have mourned him! . . . a genuine overwhelming grief, with no evil shadow on it, no bitterness in it . . . only sorrow for so brilliant a life cut short. If he should die even now she would welcome it. She would forget his disloyalty in mourning him faithfully.

Yet Katty had said there was no bitterness like Death. "Everything else we can live down. . . . Death remains the one insurmountable fact."

No, treachery was the insurmountable. Katty had never known treachery.

She looked again at her sister's card. "Think you should see Daphne." Was Daphne ill? She was never ill. But if Katty touched ever so lightly on a matter it meant there was a reason. She would go to the convent tomorrow. She had neglected the child, as she had neglected everything.

Despite late autumn, Crystal found an armful of pale roses to take up to town that Monday morning. She rejoiced to turn over her lively brood to the capable little governess who bicycled out each day to teach Bedelia and Bobby. Miss Tuckett would now remain over night whenever Crystal was away, and would undertake the three Belgians in addition to the small Americans.

"Good-bye, darlings all!" called Mummie, as the fly bore her away. "Be happy and good till I come back Thursday." And the five, not to speak of Finn McCoul, Alicia Mooney and Obadiah, shouted vociferous farewells.

Arrived in London, Crystal went directly to the convent. She had telegraphed Reverend Mother that she was coming, and Sister Martina took her up at once to see Daphne.

"Oh, Crystal, did you know how much I wished to see you?" exclaimed the pretty creature, the moment her friend appeared on the other side of the grill.

"Katty sent me a post card yesterday to say I

ought to come, dearest child," answered Crystal, "but she did not explain . . . you know Katty."

"How like you both!" laughed Daphne, with tears in her eyes. "Katty's card, and your coming at once! But are you ill, Crystal? I've never seen you look pale before."

"Am I pale? So are you, child. I reproached myself when Katty's card came for letting all these months go by. . . . But you know, perhaps even here, what these months since the war have meant."

"Yes, Katty has told me . . . you know how unwilling she is to influence anyone . . . almost as conscientious as you are, Crystal dearest. But now she says, in so many words, that it is my sacred duty, as I speak Flemish, to come back into the world and help."

Crystal was frankly surprised. "Katty must feel very strongly," she said at last, "to advise so radical a course as that. How do you feel yourself, Daphne?"

"It's like giving up Heaven for the other place," said Daphne with a little laugh. "I thought before I entered here that the war had made the whole world into the other place. Is it my duty to go down into it? I am not yet a nun . . . I am only a postulant still," and she lifted very sad eyes to her friend. "But you will answer me honestly, Crystal. Can I do enough for others with my small amount of Flemish to offset my own loss here?"

"If you could see Katty . . ." Crystal hesitated . . . "unfailing, untired, uncomplaining . . . giving every moment of her existence, that should be

divided amongst so many claimants . . . every moment to her Flemings! And now her boys are coming. What time will she have for them?"

"She didn't tell me that," Daphne interrupted.

"She is wild to go out to Blundell. How can she leave her post? She is mad to help Serbia . . . even more than Belgium she thinks Serbia has been the martyr among nations . . . and she has not a moment . . . literally not one. I've watched her. I help her . . . but I speak no Flemish . . . and if you knew what it meant to those poor peasants to find a friend . . . such a friend! to talk to them . . . to explain to them . . . to understand them!"

"And I could help . . . " Daphne said almost to herself.

Crystal had walked to the little window to conceal her tears, so that when Daphne said "Where is Uncle Horace now?" she could hide her sudden flush as well. All the blood in her body seemed to suffuse her face. "In the Argentine," she replied.

"When does he return?" pursued Daphne, with what seemed to Crystal surprising persistence.

"Not for a long time, I fancy," she answered, as quietly as she could. "Perhaps never."

She had the curious sensation that in some way this decided Daphne, although she made no comment, and gave no indication of her decision. Why should Horace's movements affect his ward?

"I must go now, Daphne child," Crystal said. "I am helping two days a week at Katty's Hostel."

"Katty told me. She says they call you 'the Children's Angel' there . . . 'Het Engeltje voor

die Kinderen' . . . when they don't call you 'Het Witte Dame.'"

The White Lady smiled at her. "You can guess what appeal the children make to me," she said. "There are three of them now at the Pond House with my two." But coming closer to the grill to say "Good-bye," she asked,

"What have you done to your lovely hair, Daphne?"

"I gouged off a handful a few days ago, myself. You know when one becomes a nun 'tis all cut. I had a feeling I wanted to cut it myself, to prove I was my own agent."

Crystal looked at her with smiling eyes.

"I know what you're thinking," Daphne flashed at her. "You're thinking that is not the contemplative spirit."

"Something like that," admitted Crystal. "I talked of you the other day to a lovely Irish Mother Superior, a friend of mine. She said no American belonged naturally to the contemplative orders . . . too independent a race, she said we were, for the cloistered life."

"O Crystal!" broke out Daphne, without answering this. "I've been so, so happy here! If the world outside knew the happiness inside these walls, you wouldn't be able to sweep people off our steps . . . they'd clamour so to get in!"

"One sees it in your face, Daphne, and in Sister Martina's."

"What wouldn't I give to show you my little room! overlooking the convent garden? . . . Never

in my life have I awakened every morning to such pure pleasure as my window gives me. Even now, in November, the birds sing there as though they knew what bliss were inside. What love and prayers and exaltation!"

"You are aware of what I feel about influencing any opinion, my child," said Crystal gravely. "But this I can say: whatever you do, my heart and my house are both yours to come to or to leave. Do you believe me, Daphne?"

"Was there ever anyone in the world who did not believe and love and honour you, Crystal?"

The two women looked at each other through those mediæval iron bars. Then Crystal held out the roses she carried. Daphne pushed a little revolving drawer under the shelf on which she leaned. Crystal dropped her flowers into it and Daphne pulled it back to her side. It was the only means by which anything could pass the grill.

"I shall offer them to Our Lady for your intention," Daphne said.

Crystal smiled at her without speaking, and then left her.

Katty's boys were not to arrive till Wednesday afternoon, so Crystal did not go to Cadogan Square till that evening. She devoted the interim to purchases for her small Belgian guests; and as she had long promised a visit to the Peter Nortons, she spent the Monday and Tuesday nights there.

Alicia had now been several weeks in Serbia, and her mother read Crystal some really delightful letters from the girl.

"All this is humanising my daughter," she said. "Without some appeal to her sympathies she would have grown into a Gorgon!"

"Horrible of you, Aileen," protested Crystal. "Of course she was austere. I believe the younger generation is always firm with its elders. But a husband and babies will modify that."

"Do you realise that she and your nephew Hazleby adore each other?" asked Aileen in her best *enfant terrible* manner.

"I've wondered," Crystal answered. "Does Katty know?"

"I think not. Alicia told me when she left. Hazleby was to tell his mother on his return."

"What an excellent combination!" said Crystal, heartily. She was too American to add "What beautiful children they should have!" But she thought it. . . . Hazleby so dark and gay, Alicia so blonde and severe . . . both tall and handsome, both the children of handsome parents. She contented herself with saying,

"The second generation is all that counts these days."

"Katty'd say the third, and that's what you're thinking," Aileen told her impishly.

The two were alone that night, but next evening Peter brought Meredith Dyfed home to dinner. Both men admired Crystal enormously, and she found an unconscious solace in their eyes. Both had had letters "from your delightful friend Dimock" and Crystal was pleased that she could ask quietly,

"What does he say?"

"He's undertaking huge contracts for southern Europe," Peter answered. "His *Bovo* is ideal food for transportation."

"Another American fortune!" gibed Aileen.

"That's unfair," said her husband quickly. "America has made no more money, proportionately, than was her due. Had conditions been reversed, we should have been getting rich while the Americans fought."

"As you did in our Civil War," said Crystal, with unlooked-for vivacity.

"*Touché!*" admitted Dyfed. "But it will be a great day when the two English speaking nations see eye to eye, eh, Peter?"

Norton's gaze seemed to rest on something they could not see. "Your great nation, Crystal," he said, "will not fail us. There's an idealism in the American spirit that some of us don't realise. That is what, in the end, will bring the English speaking races together."

"I have had that vision, too," said Crystal, very quietly, remembering Merton and Hazleby.

"And when we do stand shoulder to shoulder, understanding each other at last, on that day the millenium will dawn!"

"You mean America and England together will police the world?" said Dyfed, practically.

"Materialist!" scoffed Norton. "It's more than that. It's the idealism under the two unlikely exteriors, English and American, that will set up, un-

consciously, a standard by which the world must live and die."

"My nephews come back tomorrow," said Crystal. "There was a concrete instance of America's standing by England."

"Katty's splendid boys!" Peter turned an illumined face toward her. "Those two were worth a regiment to us, coming in at the first call! Not an English heart but beat to know that those two young Americans so testified in our favour, it might easily have been with their lives!"

And indeed, next night at Cadogan Square seemed to Crystal the loosing of all America into the English ranks.

Katty's boys were tall and exhilaratingly vigorous; their mother called them the Combination Harvard Cyclone. Both were dark, keen of eye, with the smallish nose and big chin of the type now accepted as American. Merton wore a pince-nez, and was a trifle shorter than his junior, but they were otherwise extraordinarily alike and extraordinarily unlike their mother. Little Katty's white hair and blue-grey quizzical glance behind the wicked monocle removed her infinitely from the warm brown eyes, and crisply brown clipped hair of her tall boys.

"But I gave them a sense of humour, if nothing else, glory be!" she said.

"And it's American humour, too," laughed Hazleby. "No Irish need apply!"

"'Tis all I have against them, or nearly all. They're as un-Irish as their *Mayflower* ancestors

. . . and wirra, wirra! there's never a taste of the brogue on either tongue."

"Indeed, the Mater's always said our voices were like tearing calico," Merton improved this, as he stood with his arm around Crystal's shoulder, looking affectionately from her to his mother. He had always been Crystal's boy, as Hazleby was Katty's.

"Don't tell me you love all your children in the same way," Katty would assert. "It's a mental and physical impossibility. Does one feel the same for any two human beings?"

But as they seated themselves at dinner, she went on, "Diversely as I love you, my sons, and little as I love your appalling American voices, it's like having the Breath of Heaven blow through Cadogan Square to hear your racket."

"The Breath of Heaven would sure be powerful," grinned Merton. "I suppose that's what bangs the doors, hey, Grimmer? But it's new to fix an American flavour on it!"

"Take a fond parent . . ." began Hazleby.

"Take care, too," warned Crystal. "Your mother's been spoiled lately by another son, a very wonderful person."

"Oh, that Serbian Johnny," Hazleby knew at once. "Our noses are out of joint all right. He's spilled our beans with the Mater."

"It's the beauty of the beast we hear most of," put in Merton.

"Beauty's the word, and beast distinctly isn't," Crystal replied. "He's a figure out of romance. And he adores your Mater."

"That's easy," Hazleby smiled at his parent. "We do too, but we don't let her know it."

"She doesn't even suspect it," confirmed his brother. "But what's the Balkan crackerjack's name?"

"Dakovich . . . Ştefan Dakovich," said Crystal.

"And his friends?"

"Captain Boyovich."

"And that other . . . the aide we met last spring?"

"Collovich."

"Dakovich, Boyovich, Collovich. . . . Great Godfrey! *Thinkovich!*"

"You villains! I'll not have Serbia taken lightly," remonstrated his mother.

"Now see here, Mater, you won't let us take Ireland lightly . . . if it's going to be 'hands off!' Serbia too, you might as well roll up the map of Europe."

"And why wouldn't I? Looking at you two one might as well . . . was there ever anything more un-European, more blatantly American, than my progeny?" asked Katty.

"It's interesting," Crystal answered. "The inevitable comparison between young America and older Europe . . . and of course the differences between New York and Serbia are incalculable."

"I wish Thinkovich were here this minute," Hazleby remarked. "We could measure up. There's something to him of course, if the Mater likes him so much."

"You two resemble him so closely it's funny,"

Crystal mused, "considering you're as unlike as . . . as . . ."

"Say, *Chili con carne* and ice cream," Merton assisted her.

"Just about. Yet if you were getting your passports the personal descriptions would be the same . . . all three tall, slender, dark; brown hair, brown eyes, small black moustaches, big chins," Crystal finished.

"Only your noses would be different," put in Katty.

"And our beautiful natures," insisted Hazleby. "Now speak up, Mater. Which disposition do you choose . . . American or Serbian?"

"For daily comfort, the American. For a finer idealism, the Serb. Stefan wouldn't think of those little attentions you two render all women, and most men, so easily. You, on the other hand, wouldn't put your country first, except at a great moment . . . wouldn't pre-occupy yourselves with it to the exclusion of all personal interests."

"Do you mean an American thinks of his family first, a Serb of his country?" Merton asked this.

"Exactly. Listen now to Stefan's letter. Grimmer, 'tis in that desk behind me." And when Grimmer had brought it, Katty read aloud:

"Belgrade, October, 1919.

"Dear Majka:

"This is my first day of freedom since I left you in July. We are reconstructing our government . . . and building anew our poor country. Gloriously,

Majka! But the future has a black cloud. There is an enemy worse than the Austrians, an enemy who pretends to be a friend; and on our west perhaps is Death, lurking behind treachery. The black cloud covers both. You will hear soon of strange things in Serbia. I kiss your hands.

"Your Stefan."

"It was posted at Antivari," Lady Freke said, a little tremulously. "Evidently Stefan is down there."

Hazleby had come around his mother's chair, ostensibly to look over her shoulder, but really to rub his cheek against hers; and Merton said, seriously,

"He's the right sort, your Serbian is, Mater."

It was, curiously, as though Stefan stood there, Crystal thought . . . strange uncomprehended representative of an uncomprehended country . . . the traditions of five hundred years of suffering behind him . . . amongst these moderns, to whom war, until 1917, had been only a name.

"You're thinking we Americans cut a poor figure, Tante Crystal," said Merton, who always understood her.

"You and Hazleby cut a pretty fine figure, coming to fight for the Allies before ever *we* entered the war," his aunt smiled proudly at him. "And after all, your Mater's handsome Serb officer *had* to fight for his country. You two came to fight for another country before your own was in at all!"

"It was a time when duty, not your own will,

looked plain," Merton answered, with his young sternness.

"Peter Norton always swore we'd act the moment we realised the issue," Crystal commented.

"Yes, it was no joke to bring home the truth to a hundred million people, the nearest of them three thousand miles away," Merton admitted. And later, when he and Crystal sat by the fire while Hazleby and his mother telephoned to the Nortons, he said,

"Is Daphne going to have the truth brought home to her, Tante Crystal?"

"Your Mater's told you that she's urged her coming out to help the reconstruction work generally, and our Flemings particularly?"

"Yes . . . but will she? That London convent is farther away than San Francisco. Holy Smoke! It's a waste, her being there. Think what Alicia's doing!" (The engagement between Hazleby and Alicia had already been talked of).

Crystal pictured the two girls for him . . . "Alicia a girl Crusader, riding her modern automobile into wild country, saving sick and wounded. Daphne a saint behind iron bars, praying for the world."

"Think what it has meant to old Haze," Merton said, apparently absorbed in rolling a cigarette. "To have had Alicia as well as a great cause to fight for!"

"More than that . . . I suppose the great cause must have seemed to him Alicia, and Alicia the great cause," Crystal smiled, wondering if Merton,

bless him! wished that he could personify a cause in his lovely cousin Daphne.

They talked late that evening, all four around the fire, the boys rolling their own cigarettes, Katty smoking her Irish ones, Crystal knitting a sweater for Ri-Ri. In every assembly, Crystal thought those present are the seen and the unseen. For Katty, Blundell. For Hazleby, Alicia. Perhaps Daphne for Merton . . . for herself, the only false note in that intimate circle . . . Horace. So they seemed to be seated, not four, but eight, around the glorious fire Grimmer himself came in so often to look after, altho' it was not his duty. But he could not pass either son of the house without pausing in a kind of benignity to ask "Can I get you anything, sir?"

The talk too touched softly on the absent ones, even on Horace, although the boys had never cared much for him. Crystal, watching the firelight on the young vivid faces, bent in temporary absorption over the making of a cigarette or turned eagerly toward their mother or herself . . . knowing them sound to the core, as kind as they were brave and honest . . . yet wondered if either would one day make a woman unhappy. Horace's handsome head seemed beside theirs in the firelit gloom . . . not less handsome, not less alertly American. And dear old English Blundell, watching his lively New York wife with affectionate patience. And the two girls, who were perhaps to mean the future to those beloved boys . . . all these Crystal felt near her, seeing them through the veil of her own poignant

experience, and certain, in the way war had made death certain, that she would never see them there again . . . even in spirit. "And on our west perhaps is Death, lurking behind Treachery," beautiful Stefan had written. He meant a human menace . . . but Crystal said to herself that she, and all of them, meant the chances of life. The chances would betray them . . . and of those eight, the four who sat around the fire, the four who seemed to sit there, how many would remain?

* * * * * * *

Crystal had arranged to be early at the Hostel next morning so that Katty might have a lazy breakfast with her boys. She had already been there an hour when she was called to the telephone.

It was Katty. "And who do you suppose appeared on the door mat at nine this morning as ever is?" asked her sister's warm clear voice.

"Not Blundell?" Crystal spoke quickly, longing to say "Not Horace?"

"Sister Mary of the Incarnation, no less! back in the world . . . to help the Flemings, to help you and me, my dear. She's even going to Holland for me. And Crystal, she needs you. She's got to be mothered . . . 'tis a ghost of a Daphne. I'll be down at once, and you arrange to come back here."

"I'll take her immediately to the Pond House," Crystal decided. "There's no solace for a sore heart like Oxfordshire."

"Good . . . she can practise her Flemish on Simonne," Katty suggested, "and study enough to get back her facility before she goes to Holland."

"Big Ben" was striking noon as Crystal's taxi passed the House of Commons. A moment later it stopped at the North entrance of Westminster Abbey, for Crystal, being Crystal, meant to say a prayer in that splendid tranquillity . . . not so much a prayer, as a moment's marshalling of her forces . . . Daphne would need the wisest, tenderest handling.

Twenty minutes later she knocked at the door of the delicious blue and white guest room that sheltered this new refugee. It was a pallid Daphne who opened to her . . . with dark circles under the lovely eyes. Crystal had brought her some violets from the florist close to the Abbey, and their perfume was like a caress.

"Crystal, you don't believe I'm any the less a good Catholic, do you?" Daphne broke out at once.

"No, my child, why should I?" said Crystal, closing the door and drawing Daphne toward the fire.

"Because I'm a deserter, a renegade. I've put my hand to the plough . . . and looked backward."

"No, dearest, you've looked forward, and put your hand to another plough."

"You always knew how to comfort me, Crystal, even when I was very little. But all the same, don't think, don't let anyone else think, that my devotion to my faith has weakened. You're not a Catholic. Perhaps you'll not understand."

"No, my dear, I am a heathen," her friend answered. "But if anyone can once accept a faith, why should any event affect that faith?"

"No, not events . . . but conditions. I'm wrong; not the events, not the war, not my vocation . . . it's something else. A real Catholic, a real nun, would not have come out . . . no matter what the call was."

"What was it then, my child?" asked Crystal.

Daphne looked at her with both smiles and tears, a curious astonishment and humour in her beautiful eyes as she said,

"I suppose it's my damned Protestant ancestors!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE NUN IN HARNESS

October slipped into November, and the Pond House was bleak without and glowing with fires and gaiety within.

Daphne adored children almost as much as Crystal did, and the weeks in that lively environment soon restored her peace of mind. Simonne naturally became her special charge. It was arranged that only English should be spoken before midday, and only Flemish and French after. By the middle of November Simonne's affectionate and unceasing chatter (she was making up, poor child, for months of silence!) had made Flemish an easy accomplishment for Daphne. French she had always spoken with reasonable ease.

Crystal therefore planned to introduce her soon at the Hostel, so that she and Daphne between them would take Katty's place, and that little lady could go for a holiday to her sons.

Daphne had not seen her cousins when she appeared originally in Cadogan Square, and still shrank, it seemed, from the encounter. Merton had written her several times, gay, slangy letters, keenly observant of post-war conditions and deeply interested in the technique of his work. She

showed them to Crystal, her only comment, generally, "A dear boy." Was she too good a Catholic, Crystal wondered, to allow herself to think of a cousin as anything but a cousin? Yet how Katty would have loved a marriage between those two! Crystal could hear her saying:

"Cousins? Yes. But there are cousins and cousins. And Daphne all Irish, Merton all *Mayflower,* are as far apart mentally and physically, as Dublin and Plymouth Rock."

But neither Crystal nor Daphne talked much except to discuss reconstruction problems or the needs of the villagers at their door.

Some ten days before Christmas they went up to town. At the entrance to the Hostel they met the gate keeper, Monsieur Theysskens, who said, when he was introduced to Daphne, "But surely Mademoiselle is Madame's sister? The resemblance is striking."

And Katty, watching them come across the big room together, also said, "My dears, you're as like as two of St. Joseph's lilies!"

"And I might be Daphne's mother!" Crystal rebuked her.

"Katty knows I don't think of you as a mother," Daphne smiled. "Rather as the loveliest sister in the world."

"Stefan tells me that in Serbia a man loves a sister more than anyone else," said Lady Freke.

Daphne looked at them both affectionately. "Out of Serbia," she said, "I know of two sisters some one loves far more than anyone else."

"Nice child!" the sisters smiled back at her.

"Stefan is the Serbian you find so like the boys?" Daphne asked.

"Yes, that is another surprising resemblance. He's more beautiful . . ." Katty began.

"But less efficient," Crystal took her up. "And as for beauty, one type is American, the other Montenegrin. Her Serbian is mediæval, our Americans are modern."

Did both sisters think at that moment that for either Serb or American Daphne would be an extraordinarily fitting mate? Yet for some reason Horace, not his juniors, dominated the short silence that followed. The would-be nun stood quietly before them. She had taken off her hat and furs. They studied, perhaps unconsciously, the black braids around the fine head, the wide serious blue green eyes, the straight black brows, the slim figure in its austere black gown, a little square of white at the smooth throat.

"Like and unlike," Katty said to herself, looking from Daphne to Crystal. "No wonder Horace Dimock admired both."

"Like what I wish I were," thought Crystal, regarding the girl. "Perhaps Horace wouldn't have found a new love if I had looked like Daphne."

"Unlike as two sisters can be," thought Daphne, glancing fondly at the older woman. "Alike only in their kind hearts. What would they say to know Uncle Horace, their trusted friend, had acted as he did in the convent?"

But visions were scattered by an entrancing

actuality. "Mater!" a big boyish voice shouted. They all turned to see the tall figure of radiant young America . . . coming in long strides across the big room.

"This is the greatest piece of luck in two continents!" sang out Merton's enthusiastic voice, as the boy caught all three women in one big armful.

"God is good to the Irish!" said his mother piously, shaking herself a little as he released them. "Crystal and Daphne have come up this day to take over my work here so that I can go down to you and Hazleby."

"Good news, I've leave for the day only. We'll go down on the afternoon train."

He held his mater's hand, but looked hard at Daphne. "It hasn't hurt you, Daffy," he said admiringly, "coming out of the Pound."

"Going in didn't, either," retorted his cousin. "And khaki hasn't hurt you, Mr. Second Lieutenant Merty Perty!"

"Daffy-down-dilly,
You needn't be chilly."

Merton teased his cousin in the parlance of their childhood.

"No ragging today, you infants!" said Lady Freke. "I must explain things here to Daphne. Merton, you walk about and talk half an hour with Tante Crystal. Later you may take Daphne out to luncheon, and come back in time to fetch me for the train."

"Is Hazleby as splendid?" asked Daphne, when Crystal and Merton had strolled away together.

"I'm trying not to look the fatuous mother," answered Lady Freke. "He's more so.

"Yet you can say that your Serbian is handsomer still?"

"Unmotherly, but just. He is. However, let me be Flemish Information, now, not doting parent."

So explanations, vividly illustrated by the unending cases, followed thick and fast. The executive ability Katty had long ago discerned in the girl came at once to the surface. Her Flemish, although slower than Katty's, was more exact, and she was soon answering questions and warming to the work.

Once she turned to Katty in perplexity. "This man asks, Katty dear, if, supposing the Americans hadn't come in, the English wouldn't have been beaten after all?"

Katty smiled. "This is not the first. I was asked twenty times during the war if England wasn't going to be beaten? And I had always the one answer. As Merton would say, they ate it up. 'Mijnheer.'" She turned to Daphne's questioner. (Katty always called the grimiest peasant 'Mijnheer!' in her friendly incorrect Flemish). I am American. I know your country and this country and my own country, so you may trust me. These English have never been beaten but once, and we Americans beat them, and *we were English!*"

"Thank you, Madame," said the Fleming simply.

Daphne felt her eyes fill. But she laughed too.

"O Katty! where is Home Rule now? And how do your English friends take that statement?"

"Oh, Home Rule. . . . I mustn't think of Ireland. My dear and stupid English blocked John Redmond at every turn. If I dwelt upon the blunders the War Office and the Government of Ireland made at every turn, little, absurd, persistent, atrocious blunders, I'd turn Sinn Fein myself! as indeed all Ireland will, if no miracle happens to prevent. And as to my English friends hearing that speech about their not being beaten, except once! they shrug their shoulders . . . what can they say?"

Katty was able to leave that afternoon with the easy feeling that at last she had a capable substitute. Daphne would stay with Crystal in Cadogan Square, so that the two could be all day at Katty's desk.

"The nun in harness!" smiled Katty, as she said "Good-bye," and Merton wrapped her in her furs. Daphne, turning honest eyes on her friend, answered,

"I never thought to say I was glad I'd come out, Katty. But now I say it."

"Just to be kind . . . on a big scale or a little one . . . that's a vocation," Lady Freke answered. "And here you'll be kind on a big scale. Give thanks for the chance!"

"I do," said Daphne.

CHAPTER XVIII

TEA FOR THE VILLAGE

Crystal, Daphne and Merton went down to the Pond House on Christmas Eve. Katty and Hazleby were to follow on Christmas Day. This would enable Lady Freke to be at her Hostel that morning for her special cases, and for the distribution of the toys Crystal, needless to say, had left for the exile children. . . .

Crystal had planned a quiet Christmas, as on New Year's Eve she intended to have a tea for the villagers, and every energy must be concentrated upon that. But a house party that included Katty's big noisy boys, their little but no less noisy McClinton cousins, not to speak of the youthful Belgians, could not under any circumstances be quiet.

Mrs. Rumbold was in her element. "Qui-ut or on-qui-ut, says I, m'm, if you'll excuse the liberty, m'm, you and her ladyship and Miss Daphne have worked too hard for they Belgiums. Not that they be undeservin', but it be my duty to have the finest, fattest turkey this side Wallingford. And turkey he smells good, he do!"

And when the family gathered, almost more than the little drawing room would hold, awaiting formal

summons to the blue and white kitchen, "Turkey he certainly did smell good."

Katty, Crystal, Daphne, Simonne and Bedelia were all in white . . . the big officer boys in their uniforms, the little Belgians and Bobby shining and rosy. "Distinctly not a war film!" Hazleby was saying . . . poor Hazleby, a bit wistful, seeing Merton's adoring gaze that followed Daphne . . . when a motor horn sounded outside the gate, and Crystal with a premonition said, "You go, Hazleby." And who should step out of the car but a laughing Alicia into her lover's arms? A long planned leave had brought her home that morning from Cattaro; and it had been easy to steal her father's car, and to dash down to the Pond House.

"Hazleby's vociferous rapture is something to mark the day," said Hazleby's mother, as her son reluctantly allowed Alicia to be conducted upstairs to change. When she reappeared in a few moments, also in white, Bedelia said contentedly, "Now . . . it's nearly a perfect party! Of course Tante Katty would like Uncle Blundell to be here. But I hope nobody minds 'cause Uncle Horace isn't!"

"Right O, Bedelia," said Merton, as they went in to dinner. "We don't need any *Bovo* in ours!"

"It's summer where he is," mused Miss McClinton. "I 'spose Uncle Horace is sitting in a fig leaf under a parasol and drinking iced *Bovo* now."

And Bobby added, "Very likely a . . . you know, Bedelia . . . will get him."

"A tarantula," said Bedelia, calmly. "Very

likely he's eaten up by lots of tarantulas by this time."

But the Christmas party, lively as it was, must not be considered important compared to the great event . . . the tea for the village at Pond House on New Year's Eve.

Crystal realised that her venture was a bold one . . . her new neighbours did not know her; would they distrust the stranger who planned things heretofore unknown in Sallum Prior? Your English villager, particularly in out-of-the-way places, is your unaltering conservative . . . and a tea, well as one knew the like took place in the houses of the gentry . . . even of the small farmers . . . was something to be carefully considered.

But Miss Laminda, consulted early, took up a firm stand . . . this tea was to be for the general good . . . more, for the general honour . . . and the little postmistress, in the pink knitted cap with the air of omniscience she so well understood how to assume, made it clear that Sallum Prior was to have a great opportunity. She supplied the list of names . . . for fear anyone be left out. She induced Farmer Giles to tell his men that they were free to leave an hour ahead of time on the momentous occasion, and when Crystal, the day after Christmas, went a bit timorously on her round, she found the way comfortably prepared. The procedure was the same; a knock at the neat door . . . a hearty call to "Come in, m'm, and yon cheer is fair to set on" . . . Crystal's friendly announcement . . . "I hope

you'll take tea with me at the Pond House on New Year's Eve, from 5 to 7 . . . to see our Belgians, and to let me get better acquainted with my neighbours." Then the enquiry in mock solemnity, be the hearer middle-aged or old . . . "I must ask you something very important. Are you over twenty?" The listener might be ninety . . . and the question would be received with chuckles or guffaws. "It's the first time in my life I've suspected I was witty!" said Crystal afterwards.

The age limit was necessary, as Pond House would never hold both children and adults. As it was, sixty of the villagers accepted, always with some reservation . . . for this seemed to be considered polite . . . "If so be all is well!" But all was evidently well, for the sixty came on the eventful evening.

The excitement of the children, when the time was actually at hand, bordered on the hysterical; Ri Ri in particular could not have been more agitated were the Germans approaching Brussels. A lantern had been hung at the outer gate, by half past four, none too soon, for although the invitation had explicitly been for five, the first guests arrived a half an hour ahead. Chou-Chou, deeply impressed with the gravity of his charge, was stationed at the gate, where he called loudly to each embarrassed group as it came near (practically no individual ventured to come alone):

"Please come in. Ver' velcome! Happy New Year!" and a fat mittened hand indicated the path to the open door. At this stood Ri-Ri and Bobby

near Crystal, theirs the duty of piloting the guests upstairs when Crystal had greeted them. Upstairs Bedelia and Simonne led the bonneted portion of the company into the two rooms reserved for them, while Bobby and Ri-Ri, hastily pushing the sterner sex into the other rooms, excitedly dashed downstairs for a fresh contingent. Daphne meanwhile superintended the little maids. As Mrs. Rumbold was distinctly over twenty, of course she was one of the honoured guests, and could not help about the tea. A gigantic responsibility, so it seemed to them, therefore devolved upon the small Ivy and Ada.

But the tables were all laid in advance. All three of the downstairs rooms were filled with little tables. On each table was placed a big cake, a dish of little cakes, another of currant buns, enormous plates of jam sandwiches, unlimited sugar, (no one would ever know the skirmishing Crystal and all her household had done to acquire enough sugar), a moderate jug of milk, and later and above all, an immense pot of strong black acrid tea.

There had been school treats and mothers' meetings before this at the Vicarage, Christmas Trees at the Big House, young peoples' gatherings in the little Parish Room . . . but never before this had there been a real "tea." . . . "Same as gentry has," so Mrs. Rumbold expressed it. And "It fair give me a turn," said frail old Elizabeth Woodly, "to walk up to Pond House like I was a grand visitor, and her there all in white, shakin' hands so natural with me!"

There was also, as Crystal had realised in throwing all her rooms open to inspection, a natural curiosity to gratify. Their fathers, and their fathers' fathers, had known Pond House . . . but these American strangers, kind and friendly as they were . . . how had they turned the old place about? There were rumours of the old kitchen's being now all white, with blue dishes, mats and the like . . . and it was said that the proper dining room had been abandoned to the children as a playroom!

But now it was all lamp and candle light; gay little tables with more good things to eat than could be counted . . . the white figures of Crystal, Daphne, Simonne and Bedelia moving from table to table. . . . "No stintin' in this house!" said Mrs. Rumbold in a proud whisper, from her place at one of the little tables, where she was rather elegantly blowing her tea, and allowing Miss Daphne to urge more currant buns upon her.

And when everybody had eaten to repletion and leaned back with heavy sighs of satisfaction, Bobby and Chou-Chou passed trays of what Bobby explained were "sweeties, vo in America we say candies . . . and some of vese has came from America!" these being selected solemnly, and only one taken till much urging induced the guest to try several. But a more hilarious moment approached: Crystal herself passed cigarettes, and to the ladies as well as to the gentlemen! No one had ever seen the like. Old Ben Garlick, Mrs. Rumbold's first father-in-law, so to speak, she being twice a widow, was so bold as to ask his hostess "If so be

she'd ever tried yon?" and when Crystal said "No, I don't seem to care for smoking," it was felt that no lady present could care either. But when Crystal followed it with "Tho' my sister, Lady Freke, smokes a great deal!" it was recognised that the practice was sanctioned in the highest quarters. Her ladyship smoked! and Mrs. Fitches (to be sure she was from Essex, not Oxfordshire born) promptly accepted a cigarette, and even lighted it, nervously encouraged by the whole room.

It was then suggested (perhaps to keep other ladies from this recklessness) that Bert Rust, a new comer, the Thame Carrier in fact, would sing. And amidst much applause, with everybody crowding in from the other rooms, Mr. Bert Rust sang at great length that

"You was a bird in a gilded cage"

and after many bitter reflections as to what *he* was, ended with the vocal moral that

"Youth must never not mate with Age"

and began all over again amidst the sniffs of the much affected listeners.

Some scuffling and closing of doors while this went on turned out to be the prelude of "A drama superbe, Madame! arrangé by Bidil and me," as Ri-Ri fluently announced. Chairs were quickly bumped into the blue and white kitchen, whence all the tables had been removed, and the audience

hastily packed into position under the stern direction of Bedelia. The "drama superbe" then took place in the tiny space reserved for it. A railway train was represented by four seats, in which travelled Chou-Chou, ponderous little citizen, with a gold watch and a large hat, accompanied by his wife, a very glittery lady, heavily veiled, and recognised as Ri-Ri only by the stage directions in mixed French and English that burst from the veil at intervals.

To this peaceful travelling party enter two wild roaring bandits with black masks ("our *second-best* middy ties truly, Mummie") dashingly wound half over the round faces of Bobby and Bedelia. Tragic screams from the veiled lady, forced to surrender her jewels . . . deep voiced expostulations from her chubby lord upon having his pockets rifled . . . bandits about to withdraw with ill-gotten wealth and rude glee, when the veiled lady unexpectedly leaps several feet into the air, throws off her wraps, and threatens the bandits in what seem to be seven different languages.

Bandits take refuge behind the unmoved gentleman victim, whereupon the lady, mounting the advance chair (originally the engine), begins hurling various articles of apparel in all directions, to the obvious confusion of the bandits, the embarrassment of the spectators and to the natural nervousness of Mrs. McClinton, (about to interfere as a spangled petticoat, apparently the last covering, is hurled by extremely bare pink arms so far across the room that it envelopes the blushing Mo Garlick), but who

pauses just in time . . . for the reason of all this is suddenly made clear . . . a Transformation! The alleged wife of little Mr. Serious Chou-Chou is "Ri-Ri, the Strong Man," who exhibits his muscles to an admiring audience—then leaps upon the bandits, whom naturally he overpowers with one hand; and finally mounting theatrically upon the railway train makes a bow in the finest style, and concludes with:

"Voilà! Ladies and gentlemens . . . I strong man, much kill rrrrobbers. You like? Good night!"

And great applause.

The general opinion seemed to be that this was the event of a life time. Cigarettes and candy were again passed. It was now well after nine. For a party invited from five to seven, this was doing well. Crystal looked at the excited faces of the children. She thought of poor Ivy and Ada who would have to put the things to rights . . . and as the Vicar just then looked in, she asked him quietly if her guests could be counted on soon to go?

"No, dear lady, they'll be here all night, short of a bomb or 'God save the King'!"

"Oh, could you . . . would you . . . is it very inhospitable?"

"Leave it to me," said the Vicar, and coming into the centre of the room he called for a cheer for the Pond House, then for Belgium, then for Mrs. McClinton . . . and while the enthusiasm ran high, said in his best pulpit manner, "Now, my friends, before we go home after this very agreeable eve-

ning, let us end with 'God save the King!' "

And the poor guests found themselves, when they had all stood, and finished one stanza of their National Anthem, being mysteriously propelled toward the stairs, and up . . . their hats and coats being found by Daphne and Bedelia; and down again, saying "Good Night" to the hostess . . . the general feeling summed up by old Twiggs, who said, "A fine evenin', m'm, only summat's wrong—it be too soon over!"

And then the cold outside air, and little groups making their way into the darkness.

CHAPTER XIX

RE-ENTER MR. DIMOCK

Horace Dimock's return to England in January had little in common with his June arrival of the year before . . . cold, raw, forbidding was the approach to the English shores. "Katty would say 'twas a judgment on me," thought Horace ruefully, "if she knew. Lord! what wouldn't Katty say if she knew all there was to know!"

He had come on deck to see if some glimpse of land could be discerned. But it was a black midnight, a dreary rain falling, and they ran into a cold wind. And a vessel ahead of them had reported a floating mine.

Horace didn't mind danger, but he loathed discomfort. On the other hand, he had been much struck by the courage of the women passengers in a recent storm. Not a woman had apparently turned a hair. Horace's neighbour at table, a pretty creature rather like the Patty Oliver of his Paris days, had indeed turned the colour of milk, lifting big, frightened eyes to him, but she had not made a sound. He wondered if Daphne would show as enchanting an alarm under similar conditions. Horace never claimed to find a woman less attractive who was timourous and gently clinging.

He left the bleak deck and made his way below to the warmth of the smoking saloon. The men playing cards or talking there turned friendly eyes on him. Horace was ever popular. He chose a big chair in a corner, however, where, under pretence of reading, he could give himself up to reflection. His time aboard had been too devoted to the little girl who looked like Patty Oliver to leave him much leisure for meditation. And there was much to meditate upon.

His present journey, like the last, had been hastily arranged. *Bovo* had taken him back to Buenos Aires the previous August, and *Bovo* was now hurrying his return to London this January. He had colossal contracts with the governments of France and England—"another American fortune," as Aileen had scornfully said.

He had not yet decided whether or not to reveal his presence in England to his friends. He had had no news from there in all these months. Long ago, after all communication between him and Pond House had ceased, he had come to realise acutely what a loss Crystal's weekly letters were, and had sent her a note he now saw to have been weak: "Are you never going to write to me again?" he had asked. And he had, at the same time, quite casually, he thought, reminded her of a chronometer he had expected to be delivered at Pond House shortly before he left.

Crystal had answered: "No. You have done me as great a wrong as one human being ever did

another, and yet you can be shrill about a three guinea chronometer."

Katty of course never wrote letters, and neither Meredith Dyfed nor Peter Norton had answered his to them. So he was absolutely in the dark about everything. Had Crystal gone back to New York? Had Katty's husband and boys arrived in England? Was Peter Norton in favour of this bewildering League of Nations? Was he backing Italy or Jugo Slavia? After the scene in Peter's house where they had all drunk solemnly to Serbia, "the bravest country in the world," could it be that Peter had not thrown his weight against D'Annunzio's theatrical attempts?

Where was that handsome young Montenegrin, Dakovich? Killed, very likely. Yet with what vividness Horace recalled the foreign beauty of the boy as he came towards him through that golden June evening in the Nortons' garden! And, as once or twice before, he seemed to see, with acute displeasure, Daphne's beautiful head by Stefan's even more beautiful one. He closed his eyes, to shut out the young Montenegrin and to focus on Daphne, as she had appeared to him in those two incredible visions at the convent. Visions that had dominated his life and thought as nothing else had done in his whole experience.

Had she taken the veil? Alas, it was practically certain that she had. Should he . . . could he . . . go at once to the convent? And if she had taken the veil, even the white one, what could he do? Yet Horace knew he would do something . . .

and quickly, unreflectively . . . before Crystal could intervene.

Always Crystal.

Was there danger that Crystal would ere this have warned Daphne? Told her anything of him, or their relation? No. Crystal could be counted on never to tell. Even Katty would never know. And as she was discreet, so also was she generous. Should he tell her now that it was Daphne? He was sure she did not know . . . yet she had shown an extraordinary curiosity as to her successor in his heart. . . . He had been right in keeping that knowledge from her, he said to himself . . . he had done it to protect Daphne. But now he said with equal nobility that he must let Crystal know . . . let her generosity have play. . . . No one could influence Daphne as Crystal could, Katty had said. Would she not, now that the first acerbity had gone, feel it a great opportunity to show her devotion to him, Horace? If she would release him, and at the same time persuade Daphne to leave the convent! . . . it would be as heroic a form of altruism as could be conceived. Horace quite glowed to think of it.

Of course there were serious practical difficulties in the way . . . but Horace reflected that to an American nothing was insuperable . . . and he smiled down his cigar . . . to an American in love, absolutely nothing. He could hear Lady Freke . . . if she knew! saying viciously, "Of course, if you don't draw the line at setting fire to the convent or

feeding Crystal ground glass!" What a heaven-sent blessing that Lady Freke didn't know!

All the same he found himself telephoning to Cadogan Square next morning the moment he had closed the door of his comfortable rooms in the usual hotel.

"Mr. Dimock, sir?" came Grimmer's mellow voice. "This will be an unexpected pleasure to her ladyship. No, sir, her ladyship is generally at her Hostel at this hour, for the Flemings, you know, sir. Luncheon? Unfortunately her ladyship has not lunched, so to speak, for six months. Did you have a pleasant journey, sir? No? Most unfortunate. Thank you, sir."

In a brief time Horace's taxi drew up at the entrance of the Hostel, a large, shabby, one storied place, well toward the city. A group of strangers stood near talking French. It was curious to hear so much French in the London streets. A huge constable, rather like Grimmer, was on guard at the door, smiling benevolently, very like Grimmer, on the crowd about him.

He directed Horace to Lady Freke's desk, although her ladyship had gone out, he said. But the young lady was there, always. "She keeps longer hours than what I do!" said the big policeman, holding open the door.

And Horace, looking across the big room toward the desk indicated, stopped short . . . suddenly translated from every day into a dream. Who stood at that desk?

He moved a step nearer to make sure, and

stopped again, hesitating to believe that his eyes actually saw that slim black figure, with the white at wrists and neck, the face luminous even from this distance, the black braids around the fine head.

Daphne! Daphne there! . . . Daphne in the world!

He walked what seemed an interminable distance and paused at the desk before Daphne finished with the pair to whom she was talking, peasants evidently, who said "Dank u!" repeatedly, and finally moved contentedly away. She turned then, expecting another "case," to find herself looking into Horace's shining eyes.

"My dearest child!" he said.

Daphne, for all her self-possession, did not know enough of the world to realise how admirable, under difficult circumstances, Horace's manner was. But she felt herself encompassed by a flattering cordiality with the warm personal note no woman, even a would-be nun, but must respond to, especially when it emanates from anything so handsome and confident as the presence now before her.

Moreover, the Hostel was not the convent. What seemed shocking in the one was but part of the emotional atmosphere of the other. Daphne had perforce put her hand into Horace's outstretched one. She felt it held there, and, looking up shyly into his kind and glowing face, she blushed and smiled, not knowing why, looked down, and finally withdrew her hand.

"When did you come? Katty will be sorry to miss you——" she heard herself saying nervously:

"She has just gone out of town. Hazleby wasn't well. I am so proud to be trusted with all her work here."

Horace hardly dared speak. "I've just landed," he said. "I should have gone out to the convent if I hadn't found you here. And if I hadn't found you there, Daphne, I should have searched all England for you."

Daphne was saved the embarrassment of replying by a tall Fleming, apparently a labourer, whom she greeted now with pleasure.

"Excuse me, Uncle Horace," she murmured, "this man has news for me." And as she explained when he had gone, "It was a man who goes to Holland for us. He had come to advise me about a young girl who is wild to go back to Alost."

Horace was obviously not listening. The joy of looking at her was enough, and Daphne rather disconnectedly continued, conscious of something that both charmed and repelled her:

"'Tis easy enough now to go. But not so long ago it was death to make that journey."

"It'll be death to me, Daphne, if you don't explain matters. Are you out for good? When did you leave the convent? What decided you at the last?"

Daphne felt herself flush again under those impassioned eyes.

"Yes . . . I don't know . . . I am useful here, for a while any way. I left last November. It was Crystal who made me see my way at the last."

Horace bit his lip. "Where is Crystal?" he asked finally.

"She's here three days a week . . . Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. The rest of the time she's down at Pond House."

So there would be these two days, Horace thought, while she went on.

"I stay at Katty's the first half of the week, and at Crystal's the last."

"Will you go out to lunch with me?" he asked.

"Oh, no. We never leave this desk unless someone's on duty here."

"Don't you eat?" Horace smiled, remembering Grimmer's "her ladyship hasn't lunched, so to speak, for six months."

"Yes, at three. When I am alone here, one of the interpreters takes my place for twenty minutes, and I dash out then. That's what Katty and Crystal do, too."

"May I stay here and watch the working of the machine?" he asked.

"Why, yes," responded the girl, cheerfully, "only I'm likely to make you useful, Uncle Horace."

"No 'uncle,' mademoiselle, plain Horace. And now how can I be useful?"

The would-be nun was a capable young woman. She might blush under the unaccustomed fervour of manly eyes, but she put their owner to work immediately. To Horace, used to the all-observant and unnoticed care Crystal had always bestowed upon him, and to the devoted attention of his Buenos Aires household, it was a new sensation to be as

strenuously employed as if he were a messenger boy. He found himself rushing to the telegraph office, to the bank, to a shoe shop with a nervous little Baron de Verbrugghe, to the station with two Antwerp waitresses, talking French to "cases" Daphne had no time for. By three he looked so exhausted that Daphne, of her own accord, suggested his getting a comfortable meal at once. When he declined to leave her, she agreed to secure a substitute for an hour, so that she could go with him.

As they left, Horace looked about for some means of making a donation, found a box for pennies, and put in a "green back," which Daphne saw just in time to make out the denomination.

"A hundred dollars, Horace!" Daphne beamed at him. "How good of you! And you can see for yourself how useful it will be."

But as they seated themselves in a quiet corner of the big grill room overlooking the river, Horace said,

"Aren't there constant small calls on your own purse, Daphne?"

"O yes, but Crystal insists on making me an allowance for my work here."

This almost spoiled Horace's own plan; but when the waiter had taken their order, he pulled out his cheque book again, and wrote carefully. "We must do our business in a business-like manner," he smiled across the little table at Daphne. And when he handed her the cheque, she found that it was

payable to "Miss Daphne O'Brien, ac'ct Flemish Relief Fund," and was for five hundred pounds.

"You must open a separate account with this," he said, thinking five hundred cheap for the lovely colour and the swimming eyes before him. "And you can count on the same amount every three months."

"But it's a fortune, Horace. What you put into our box was splendid enough, but all this . . . why, it's nearly two thousand five hundred dollars!" (Horace didn't tell her it was a bare $1700.) "All this for my own special cases! Oh, if you realised what happiness and comfort it will give to such dear, dear people!"

Her voice broke. And if the waiter had not at that moment placed the tureen of welcome soup before them, she would, she felt sure, have burst into tears.

Horace Dimock had played with the word "psychology" long before the war brought it to the man in the street. But it was the psychology of woman that he was most inclined to study; particularly that science of the feminine soul in its relation to the masculine, even more particularly in its relation to Mr. Horace Dimock's soul.

When Crystal had, so unexpectedly to herself, fallen in love with him in those Wicklow days, psychology had taught him that it was the exact moment for it . . . a widow of thirty-six, knowing only the elderly affection of a Scotch Presbyterian, in a setting of early lore and rebel tradition like

Glenmalure. With Leonora, Patty and even Alpha, not to recall the briefer loves of his varied career, he had always known the psychological moment . . . and at twenty-one, thirty-one, forty-one, had always seized it.

And now he read Daphne to his own satisfaction . . . her natural reaction from the austerities of the convent, the poignant human drama about her here, making human love the only abiding factor on a stage of suffering and privation . . . her age . . . for he had observed that twenty-three was the responsive time with young creatures . . . and the novelty, and what he intended should be the magnificence . . . of his wooing.

Fortune played into his hands. That first evening, Daphne was kept till nine o'clock at her desk. It was not hard to persuade her, tired and hungry as she was, to go to dinner with him. When they reached Cadogan Square at eleven who could have handed her over with more fatherly care to Grimmer than Horace? And hardly had his taxi departed than she found awaiting her a great basket of violets and roses so expensively abundant as literally to fill the house with their fragrance.

Next morning her desk too was like a garden, and hidden amongst the flowers some hot house peaches . . . Daphne knew them to be two shillings apiece . . . with a little note saying he would call for her at three.

Meanwhile a telegram came from Katty to say that Hazleby was really ill . . . ptomaine poison-

ing . . . and that she would not leave him for several days.

So Horace found it easy to persuade Daphne not only to lunch with him at three, but to dine at seven, and later to see a show. And as they drove home after what to Daphne was a really thrilling evening, Horace asked her gravely if she would do something for him? Who would not wish to do anything she could for so kind a guardian? The request was singular, but Daphne agreed at once . . . it was to postpone letting Crystal know that he had arrived . . . for Crystal was due next morning at the Hostel.

The next morning more flowers on her desk, and a tiny package . . . in it one of the new American wrist watches, no bigger apparently than could be covered by a sixpenny bit, with "To D. from H. D." on its golden back. And a note asking her to ring him up at his club by two.

It was a quiet morning, and when she had arranged her flowers and fastened the dainty wrist strap around her firm white wrist, Daphne stood, uninterrupted for nearly ten minutes, her face buried in a bunch of the violets, thinking of their giver, whose generosity was royal, and whose manner was so kind.

So absorbed was she that she did not see Crystal's tall white figure coming toward her, turning only when a little peasant woman beside her exclaimed: "Goed! Het witte Dame!" but the radiance of her glance faded when she realised how pale and drawn Crystal looked.

"What is it, Crystal, dear? Has something happened?"

For answer Crystal held out a telegram.

"Blundell dead. Heat stroke, Basra. Can you come here few days? Hazleby still ill. Going away by myself. Katty."

"Oh, poor, poor Katty!" burst out Daphne. "And poor Sir Blundell! You're going down to Hazleby at once, Crystal?"

Crystal nodded, still unable to speak.

"And I'll stay on duty here till Saturday," Daphne continued, "and then go down to the Pond House to be with the kiddies over Sunday."

"Yes, my dear, please," answered her friend. "Miss Tuckett will stay till you come. I shall of course not leave Hazleby till he is quite himself."

"Where do you think Katty will go?"

"She'll hardly tell us. But I imagine to Ireland. She met Blundell there, in the Wicklow Glens."

"Poor little Katty, alone with such memories!" grieved Daphne.

"And not knowing how Blundell died," Crystal went on, "wondering if he realised it, if he needed her." Crystal walked away a moment. Paler than ever when she came back, she said: "It's the beginning only. Our first offering as a family on the altar of this war, and the bitterness of it—the war so long over!"

"What delicious violets!" she said a moment afterwards, and Daphne chose the finest bunch and slipped it into Crystal's belt.

"I know you've a special feeling about violets," she said.

"Yes, child, I couldn't take or wear violets except from someone I loved," Crystal answered. "Absurd, isn't it? but to me violets are the dearest things in the world, after children. I shall send some by the last post tonight to Glenmalure, on the chance of their reaching Katty."

Daphne went to the big door to put her friend into a taxi. It was nice to see her wearing Horace's violets, she thought to herself, as she turned back. "The two people I suppose I love best in the world! I wish I might have told Crystal Horace was here."

Later when she telephoned him as he had asked, at two, she found that he had already heard the sad news, which had been posted in the club . . . Blundell's club as well as Horace's. And Peter Norton's paper, of which the early edition was now on the street, devoted nearly half a column to "A Very Gallant Gentleman, Sir Blundell Freke, who had given his services, much of his fortune—and now his life, in Mesopotamia."

And Horace and Daphne, dining at a quiet little restaurant in Soho, talked of Blundell and Katty. Horace could tell his companion of those Wicklow days when the kindly big Englishman so completely lost his heart to the gay little widow. "He was four years older than I am now, Daphne," Horace paused to bring it home to her. And Daphne, who had always considered Sir Blundell a very old gentleman, reconsidered . . . in four years Horace

would not be an old gentleman. Could anyone imagine her wonderful guardian as ever anything but handsome, brilliant and, yes, young?

That was Wednesday. Thursday, Friday and most of Saturday still remained to him, and Horace, psychologist and old campaigner, carried through masterly manœuvres on all three days.

It had been a cold month, but that Friday evening was mild and moonlit. They had dined in Chelsea, and afterwards walked on the Embankment, talking. Horace put Daphne's hand into his arm as they started, and held it there, even when they paused to lean against the parapet, looking down at the silvered river.

"I hope it has been a happy week . . . in spite of the bad news," he said finally. And when Daphne answered: "Oh, it has, it has!" he carried her hand to his lips. She tried to draw it away, but not violently; so he kissed the wrist, slipping down her loose glove to do so.

"Little girl," he said gently, "will you trust me, perhaps for a long time? You know I love you. You've known it from the beginning. But there are certain claims on me that I must first clear away. I cannot tell even you what they are . . . for they are not, properly speaking, my concern," and he looked very noble and handsome in the moonlight, taking off his hat as he spoke to her, but holding her fast with the other hand.

"I don't know . . . I don't know myself, I'm afraid," Daphne answered. "I love your loving

me. I was never so proud in my life . . . but that isn't really loving you, you see."

"I see enough, darling child. I ask you now only to trust me, and to keep my secret for the present."

"May I not talk it over with Crystal?" asked Daphne. "She'd understand so well how I feel!" And fearing from Horace's silence that he thought she was comparing him to the late Mr. McClinton and herself to Crystal, she hastily added: "Of course I won't, if you don't wish me to."

"Better not, dearest child," said Horace in his handsomest manner. "I must give you time to make certain whether you can love me . . . till then I'm at your mercy . . . I don't wish anyone to know. Beside, just now, darling, with this new sorrow in the family . . ."

Daphne felt herself rebuked. Oh, so gently! and as they walked up Sloane Street together she found herself very tender and grateful for this wonderful affection she was offered.

"Even supposing I don't love him in the way I thought one ought to," she said to herself, "I've made a failure of my convent life. Shouldn't I try to do something else, something that somebody wants me to as much as Horace seems to want this?" Of course Merton wanted her too, but a cousin was out of the question.

Horace was wise enough to leave her at Cadogan Square with only a pressure of the hand as he said good night. She went up stairs quickly, and he stayed a moment to talk with Grimmer.

"No, her ladyship was not coming home yet awhile. She had telegraphed him to see to everything. Yes, she was in Ireland" . . . Grimmer understood that there were associations. . . . "That would explain it, sir. Yes, it was a very serious loss, very serious, sir. If he had lived, he Grimmer, often thought Sir Blundell would one day be Prime Minister, an upholder of the British Constitution, sir. And more a friend in the house than a master." Grimmer finished with a little choke.

Horace, really touched, shook hands with him, and Grimmer said "Thank you, sir," standing large and mournful, and always the ideal servant, in the open doorway as Horace left. The latter envied Katty a little as he came away, wondering if, when his present difficulties were past, and he had established Daphne in the fitting comfort of a London house, he would happen on anyone so perfectly adapted to his service as Grimmer?

Next morning on Daphne's desk was a great box of creamy roses, like a bride's, Daphne thought, blushing . . . and a little box, from a Bond Street jeweller—Daphne had never cared for jewels, but even to her ignorant eyes the little string of pearls she found inside seemed very splendid. She did not see Horace himself—till he called to take her to Paddington Station. He had had important letters to write, he explained. He did not explain that the letters were one, and that one to Crystal. He knew that the hostess of Pond House was to return by Monday, and as Daphne would be leav-

ing earlier that day to come up to town, he counted on his letter to Crystal as arriving after Daphne's departure, and as thus giving Crystal time to reflect upon it alone.

CHAPTER XX

DAPHNE AND CRYSTAL

WHAT he had not counted on was Bedelia's developing pneumonia. There had been rumours of an escaped German prisoner, who dashed about the Oxfordshire roads on a motorcycle, of which the number had been altered! and the Pond House children (for the little Belgians were still there) were in a frenzy of excitement. Bobby and Mr. Honey had planned to take the villain red handed, so that it behooved Bedelia and Ri-Ri to be up and doing. A midnight excursion in a pouring rain, a return unknown to Miss Tuckett in icy wet garments, and an hour's hanging about in draughts, had done for Miss McClinton.

Crystal, rushing home in response to Daphne's frightened telegram, found her small daughter dangerously ill. For three days neither she nor Daphne dared to hope. There was only one doctor in many miles . . . and no nurse to be had for love or money. Crystal let Daphne relieve her when her anxiety permitted, or when she was literally exhausted, and neither thought to ask for, or look at, letters.

On the fourth day, the doctor gave them the first encouragement, and Daphne, remembering with a

pang that Horace was probably deeply anxious at her failure to reappear in London, said to Crystal that she must send a telegram, and would walk in to the market town to do so.

Crystal looked at her curiously. It would have seemed natural for Daphne to say to whom she must telegraph. Then that string of valuable pearls . . . left carelessly on the girl's dressing table . . . but she said quietly:

"Let's look at the mail before you go." And Daphne brought up a quantity of letters, papers and a telegram. The child was asleep, and Crystal and Daphne sat in the next room where they could talk without disturbing her.

Almost the first envelope Crystal examined was Horace's. A deep flush covered her face. Daphne saw the handwriting at the same moment, and flushed too. She opened the telegram to hide her confusion: "For God's sake, telegraph me what's wrong. Horace," it said . . . and as she read it, she saw Crystal's hand clutch at her heart, and heard a sort of convulsive sigh that made her jump just in time to catch her friend as she fell forward. Daphne had never seen anyone faint before, but she had read that you must let a fainting person lie flat, the head on a level with the body. She managed this with some difficulty, and knelt by Crystal in terror, fearing, her pallor was so alarming, her lips so bloodless, that she was dead. Common sense told her to loosen the neck and belt of Crystal's white morning gown, and in a few moments her friend gave a little sigh and opened her eyes.

In her hand she still held the letter, and it seemed to Daphne she wished to give it to her.

But Daphne hesitated to take it. Kneeling by this friend whom she so loved, seeing her helpless, ghastly, herself shaken and weak after the three days of anxiety for the sick child, she felt unaccountably afraid of Horace's letter.

"Crystal, Crystal," she implored, always in a low voice lest Bedelia awake, "say you feel better. Nothing matters, Crystal, darling, except that we all love you and need you. What, *what* made you faint, dearest?"

Crystal looked at her with hunted eyes. "You, Daphne! it was you! . . . little Daphne!"

"Not I that made you faint, Crystal dearest?"

"No . . . Horace . . . Horace's——" she tried for a word . . . "perfidy. Horace's perfidy."

Daphne's heart grew cold. "Horace's perfidy?" she repeated. "Tell me, Crystal. I have a right to know."

"Yes, you have a right to know." Crystal struggled to sit up . . . and Daphne very tenderly helped her, pulling down the pillows from the bed close by, to pack around her.

Crystal looked at her as though from a great distance. "Someone said once 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And you will be forgiven, Daphne, for you didn't know, you don't know now."

"Tell me, tell me, if you're strong enough, Crystal."

"Horace has written me that it is you he loves

. . . and wishes to marry. I've known, a long time, that he loved someone. I never dreamed it was you!"

"But why shouldn't he love me?" Daphne asked breathlessly.

"To love you, he must be free . . . free of me, that is. He asks me to divorce him."

"To divorce him!" Daphne hardly breathed it.

"Yes. I'm his wife."

CHAPTER XXI

THE CLEARER VISION

LATE winter was like spring. The fruit trees blossomed before their time, and a benign soft air breathed over the Oxfordshire meadows.

Daphne walked in the Pond House garden and up the long, straight paths. It was early morning of the day after Crystal's revelation. They had been silent and very tender with each other all that terrible afternoon, and in the evening when Bedelia, blessedly cool and like herself, was sleeping soundly and the rest of Pond House was quiet, they had sat long over the fire, reviewing Horace's letter.

A wave of indignation seemed to engulf Daphne again as she thought of its terms. Every sweet emotion of her heart and mind cried out for Crystal. Every Catholic instinct in her revolted against Horace; for it was on Catholic grounds he urged the divorce! Horace, that back-slider, actually suggested that as a Catholic he could not now consider his marriage to Crystal as valid, because it took place in Alpha's life-time. Divorce was not recognised in the Catholic Church, and he could not claim to have been free from Alpha when their own ceremony was performed. He urged Crystal's divorcing him now, although in the same breath he main-

tained that there had been no marriage, on the ground that this would make it easier for her and would satisfy legal requirements for him.

Daphne had asked only one question: Why had Crystal consented to keeping the marriage a secret?

"Oh, Horace said he couldn't hurt Alpha, who had not long to live, by the public affront our marriage would be to her," answered Crystal wearily. "I believed this, of course. I realize now that he knew Alpha had left her money to him, and thought that she would alter her will if she knew he had married again. Alpha's money, you see, was the foundation of Horace's *Bovo* fortune."

"Then it was really poor Alpha who paid for the wrist watch and the roses and the string of pearls," said Daphne, grimly humorous.

"And once secret, it always seemed difficult to make the marriage known," Crystal went on. "We had planned to announce it when he returned to England last June . . . but Fate, behind an iron grill, was stronger than Horace!" she smiled wanly at the girl.

"His own colossal egotism was stronger than right or kindness," replied Daphne, the hot colour rising in her face. "I shall never trust my own intuition again. I thought him so fine, so noble, so generous!"

"He is generous, and in many ways he is astoundingly fine," said the older woman, tolerantly. "It's only that he doesn't ring true . . . some fault in the original casting," she mused. "Nothing could be more un-German than Horace . . . yet the same

thing appears in his nature and in the nature of the German race. An inherent *wrongness,* an alloy that by hideous accident was mixed with the true metal. You and I are suffering from it in Horace. The whole world has suffered from it in Germany."

But Daphne, with the hot intolerance of youth, could not make any allowance; black was black to her . . . for Horace's conduct no possible excuse, now or ever, was to be made. She was for punishing him bitterly, publishing his infamy. Was he not to suffer any of that agony he had so wantonly inflicted upon Crystal?

But the latter's gentleness prevailed. And a smiling suggestion that perhaps she would not even be there to see that retribution, brought Daphne to her friend's side in deep alarm.

"Not here? Do you mean you're not well, Crystal? Was it your heart made you faint? I shall bring Doctor Colefax out to examine you this afternoon!"

"I've already been to a specialist," Crystal replied lightly. "At first I thought (when all this originally happened) that it would be a matter of weeks and I was ridiculously pleased to be going. But then I had to picture poor Katty with my difficult young . . . Dr. Bryan Doble was the man I saw. He says if I am careful I can go on for years . . . I must have no worry or sudden shock."

"So Horace was nearly a murderer as well as a thief," said the girl fiercely.

She quickened her steps now in the fresh morning, thinking of this conversation, of Crystal's

lovely white face, on which the brows and the long lashes looked so black. Were all men wicked? She thought again of Merton. But that was different, he was only a boy, Katty's boy, too, and Crystal's nephew and her own cousin. And Merton had been all these years at the Front, risking his life. Horace would never risk his life. Even Sir Blundell, years older than Horace, had both risked and given his. No, all men were not like Horace. And she remembered that Katty, who knew more of men than anyone else, believed them to be much better than women were.

At that instant she heard Simonne calling her; "Mademoiselle!" She said "Mademoiselle" as they said it in Alost. In Rijsdijk, where Daphne had learned the language, they said "Juffrouw!" In a moment Simmone came like a small blue and blonde whirlwind upon her.

A telegram had arrived . . . from Lady Freke for Madame McClinton. Mademoiselle must look, look! a letter had reached London from Alost, from Simonne's father. They had gone back to their own town. And her father must have written to say her mother needed her. Simonne was certain.

The telegram was: "Returned last night. Letter here from Simonne's father. Holding it for your instructions. How is everybody? Love. Katty," and it was marked "Reply Paid."

It seemed the boy was waiting. Daphne decided upon her course unhesitatingly. She would answer: "Bringing Simonne town today. Bedelia recovering serious attack pneumonia. Crystal exhausted.

Regret absence from Hostel. Love, thousand times, Daphne."

She explained her plan to Simonne as they walked down to the gate to find the messenger. A boat was leaving Saturday night for Holland. If her mother needed her, Simonne should cross then, trusting to find her way into Belgium. Daphne could get her the necessary passports and instructions. Simonne must pack all her things now on the chance of going. Daphne did not tell her that she meant to go herself. The idea had only just occurred to her. But Flemish-speaking Americans were still needed in both Holland and Belgium. She knew that Lady Freke had been asked to go on this very boat.

What a chance to escape the horror of Horace's possible reappearance! No one should know where she had gone, except Crystal and Katty, and they would not tell.

She made a hasty parcel of Horace's pearls, the watch and the cheque for five hundred pounds, fortunately not yet deposited in the bank. On a bit of paper she wrote:

"Your letter made Crystal faint. The truth came out before she recovered. Thank God you have not added murder to your other crimes. . . . Daphne O'Brien."

This package should go registered, from Sallum Prior, so that Horace would think her still there.

Her other preparations were soon made. Crystal approved her going, a little wistfully, and they clung to each other at parting. But Simonne's joy

dominated everything. She was not ungrateful for their care, she would write Madame, oh, very often! She would send post cards of Alost to Bobby of what the "fal-se, fal-se" Germans had left there. She would name a kitten for Bedelia and a little pig, when they had pigs again! for Mr. Honey. But she was soon to see her mother! she would take care of her . . . men knew nothing of care for a sick woman.

"And when I am an officer in the Belgian Army, Simonne," prophesied Ri-Ri with sparkling eyes, "I shall ride up to Alost, on a fine horse, and I shall call in a loud voice: 'Where is the house of Mademoiselle Simonne van den Poel?' and Simonne will come running out with a glass of beer for Captain Henri de Wiart, and a pail of water for his fine horse, and we will drink to the Pond House, and to Bedelia and Bobby!"

"And to Weelum Jawge!" put in Bobby.

"Yeh, to Mr. Honey!" mocked Ri-Ri.

"Good-bye, Simonne!" they all called, running after the fly. "Au revoir! Kill the Kaiser when you see him!"

CHAPTER XXII

"DANK U WEL, ENGELAND!"

"Simonne van den Poel, Engeland."

THIS was all the inscription on the letter they found at Cadogan Square, although on the back it admitted that it was from C. van den Poel, naïvely adding, "Vader van Simonne."

Extraordinary that it had reached Simonne.

"Very creditable to our postal service," said Grimmer, as Daphne marvelled over this. Yet she herself had received a letter not long before from Chicago, addressed only "Miss Daphne O'Brien, Flanders," which had been safely delivered at the Hostel.

Simonne's little face was a study, as, plumped down in the first chair in the entrance hall, she arduously made out her father's letter. Daphne also was too impatient to go upstairs.

"Tell me about Lady Freke," she asked of Grimmer.

"Her ladyship came in late last night; very tired, she was, Miss, but would eat nothing. This morning I called a taxi before nine. My lady said she was needed at the 'Ostel. Your telegram came at ten, Miss, and her ladyship had me telephone it to her."

"I'll go to her at once, and Grimmer, please don't let *anyone* know I'm in town."

"Certainly, Miss," agreed the large one, looking with studied carelessness at the card tray. "Several enquiries for you, Miss, most urgent. Every day. And a number of parcels . . . flowers, her ladyship's maid said. Now in your room, Miss."

"Clever old Grimmer!" thought Daphne. But she said only, Thank you so much. I don't want anyone, anyone at all to think I'm here."

If Grimmer had a momentary regret for the frequent half sovereigns that had accompanied those "several enquiries" he allowed no trace of it to cloud his benignant speeding of Miss O'Brien and the "Belgian young person" on their hasty way.

They hurried by Tube to the Hostel. On the way Daphne read van den Poel's letter:

"Simonne! our dear daughter.

"Now is there by good luck" (ran its laboured Flemish) "a cousin from my mother in Holland, by Dordrecht. He is a good man, very poor, married with a Hollander, and many children. It is a pity you must leave Engeland. We hear that all is good in Engeland. Much to eat. Here is there little. But your mother is very sick. Jan and Piet can not take good care of your mother. And Jan was shot by a soldier. In the leg. Your mother asks always for Simonne. My cousin is also Cornelis van den Poel, so as I. He will help you to come to Alost. The village is Rijsdijk. The father from Cornelis is Pieter, but Pieter is dead. Everybody in Rijsdijk will know Pieter.

"Be careful, Simonne. And come quickly. Your father. C. v. d. Poel."

"And now it is yet two days before I can start!" mourned Simonne. "My mother is very sick, I know it. My father will not write if she is not very sick. We do not like to write in Alost. But when I come to Rijsdijk I can walk quickly to the boat, and the boat will bring me to another cousin, only three days from Alost, walking all the day."

Daphne looked at her curiously. "You're not afraid, Simonne, of the long journey?"

"Oh, no," answered Simonne. "If the Germans are there, I go, the same!"

When they walked into the Hostel, there stood Lady Freke at her desk, in unaccustomed black, but composed and even cheerful. She asked about Crystal and Bedelia with anxiety, but reassured by Daphne, turned her attention to the matter of Simonne's departure.

"Only," she said, "it's like sending a lamb into the lion's den to let that child go alone."

"Nothing would stop her," Daphne answered; "the whole resistance of Flanders is in that small Fleming."

The desk had a big bowl of violets upon it. "Crystal must have telegraphed her florist to deliver them here," Katty said. And as they talked, both the woman and the girl inhaled their sweetness gratefully.

"Crystal thinks she can return to the Hostel next Wednesday," Daphne ventured. "And, Katty, I

wish to go to Holland when Simonne does. There are very good reasons. Will you mind if I don't tell you what they are?"

"Not minding in this case means helping you to do what I disapprove?" answered Lady Freke, with some of her old sparkle. But she was not so much in the dark as she would have been if Grimmer had not mentioned Mr. Dimock's arrival and frequent appearances; if she had not seen, in glancing into Daphne's room that morning, a surprising array of roses, orchids and fruit blossoms, and a number of letters in Horace's well known hand.

"Are you quite sure 'tis the only thing to do?" she asked now, seriously.

"Yes, Katty. And Crystal is willing. They need Flemish-speaking volunteers over there. You know how keen they were to get you. Let me go in your place."

Katty considered. "Well, if you'll agree to two things. First, to stay in Rysdijk, where Vrouw van Waaldorp will take care of you. Second, to let me pay all expenses."

Daphne managed not to cry, as she said: "Crystal is giving me thirty pounds a month . . . plenty, plenty!"

"Very well, I shall give you thirty more. Suppose I make it up to an even three hundred dollars? There may be calls upon you, my child."

By Saturday, passports, authorisations, letters of introduction, all were ready. Katty took both girls to tea at the big Americanised hotel near the Hostel.

A little lady from California, one of the Food Commission, came too, but she would not eat.

"And such delicious fresh cakes!" urged Daphne.

"No," said the little lady; she was making her tenth trip across the North Sea. "I never eat beforehand. They say you float better when you strike a mine if you're empty!"

However, Daphne was not alarmed. She and Simonne not only ate with enthusiasm, but took along a royal basket of provisions, Grimmer's gift for the journey.

Katty went with them to Fenchurch Street Station. "I don't like farewells," she said, "so I'll go no further," and resolutely turned away when she had seen them comfortably settled in their compartment. But when the train drew out, nearly half an hour later, and Simonne leaned from the window to say "Dank U Wel, Engeland!" they caught a glimpse of Lady Freke's little black-clad figure, the sombre veil blowing against her white hair, as she watched their train slide away into the night.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN HOLLAND

They met no mines, floating or anchored. And reaching Rotterdam in the normal grey mist of that picture-card approach through flat distances and past squat barges and windmills, they made their way to the train and were soon in Dordrecht.

Katty loved Siena and Cork and Oxford, Daphne remembered. Crystal adored Girgenti . . . but the girl thought rapturously that she loved her "Dort" as dearly.

The smoky little tram that must take them to Rijsdijk had just departed, so they had an hour to themselves. Daphne was only too happy to wander through the narrow streets she recalled with such pleasure.

It was curious that Fate should be bringing her back to the only two places she knew well in Holland . . . Dordrecht and Rijsdijk. Nothing seemed altered though it was six years since they had been there, Katty, Crystal with the baby Bedelia, and Daphne herself. Mr. McClinton was in London for some long-drawn-out History Conference, and they had spent the three months of his absence in Rijsdijk.

Simonne walked about with an amusing air of

consequence. She had been such a modest little mouse in England! "But here she steps high," as Daphne wrote Crystal. "She certainly feels her oats." Daphne gave her some money and asked her to buy a honey cake, while she herself strolled toward the Cathedral. The sun shone now, but so much mist lingers always in the Dordrecht air that even at close range the great square topped tower was blue, as with distance.

Certain phrases run in the mind . . . and to Daphne recurred continually:

"This Venice of the northern seas."

The war was over, but it had been next door. It might as well have been in Africa. There was no suggestion of it here . . . but the same detachment about this city of canals and boats and ancient houses that Daphne remembered in that lazy summer in Venice with Katty and the boys . . . long, long before war times. Here the dear Hollanders went about their business as though the clock had never moved. Through the shining windows of a tall house on the Delfthaven Daphne recognised, in its old place on the wall, the melting landscape of a famous Dutch painter, whose daughter she had visited in that very house. Her memory duplicated for her the polished old furniture of the spotless room, and a hard little rosy peach on the priceless blue of an old Delft plate, while her friend, pallid and composed as a Ver Meer *genre* canvas, smiled at her over the afternoon coffee cups.

She came back to the Cathedral to find Simonne in a fever of impatience. They had just time for their train, and the little boys who carried their bags clattered noisily on their "klumpen" after the "Engelsche dames." They are the worst little boys in the world, the little Hollanders, for all they grow into such fine men; but when they attempted some impudence upon receipt of their quite adequate bits of silver, it was an obvious surprise to them to have the younger of the supposed "Engelsche dames" pour out a tirade at them in their own language. They retired hastily . . . little Hollanders are not courageous, and stuck their tongues out and yelled "Vlaamsche!" at her. They likewise shouted pleasantly

"Keizer op!
Vlaminger 'neder!"

evidently an old war time taunt. ("Kaiser up! Fleming under!") And Simonne was retorting from the door of the tram in unexpectedly strident tones upon the international situation, "The Flemish at any rate have dared to fight!" when luckily they started.

Rijsdijk was only fifteen minutes away, even by the jerky little tram, which stopped with a bounce near the inn . . . they called it the "Hotel" in Rijsdijk . . . Vrouw van Waaldorp, with the wintry sun shining through the great white wings of her flapping cap, stood in the doorway just as she had stood six years earlier.

She remembered Daphne at once, and of course

she knew Simonne's cousin, a good man down the "Kekker," she said . . . the Kekker was a little lane of the poorer houses. . . . And here, as it was the dinner hour, they found Cornelis, a bald, kind little Belgian, with a tall good looking Dutch wife, Janneke, and seven little Jannekes, all gazing wide eyed at the strangers. Cornelis and his *vrouw* took in new ideas slowly, but once in all was well. Yes, surely, Cornelis would go with Simonne to the frontier, by water, and start her homewards.

It was all too easy. By three in the afternoon Cornelis and Simonne had departed, the small girl impatient and important, her money (both Crystal and Katty had supplied her well) sewed into the hem of her petticoat. She had no misgivings, except as to her mother's health.

Cornelis returned early next morning. They had gone up the river nearly to the frontier. There was naturally some delay at the dividing line—who could blame Belgium for watching her borders? —but after that, no trouble. They found a good man who was going to Alost, and who knew Simonne's father, and Simonne had spent very little of her money, "Gelukkig!"

And she had gone away rather white, Juffrouw, poor little maid! but laughing.

Daphne found herself, now that this responsibility was off her shoulders, absurdly tired. Crystal had foreseen this, and had made her promise to rest three days before seeing to her business for Katty. "One has to grow old," she had said to

the girl, "to understand that emotional fatigue is more severe than physical. You've passed through some serious times, my Daphne."

So she drifted, well wrapped against the cold, on the sluggish river, steering the clumsy boat in which Mijntje would push her off. (Baas, the handy man of old days, was not yet back from the army.) Or she wandered about the village, renewing old acquaintances amongst the peasants. She found a natural anxiety lest Holland be drawn into new difficulties; much grumbling at the high prices; little understanding of the real issues of either the war or the peace.

The old doctor, however, intelligent and well read, deplored his country's long forced neutrality, and hated Holland's guest, the Kaiser, as bitterly as the Belgians did. Alas, he was not over fond of the Belgians, or even of the Flemings. Daphne discovered that the two peoples, such close neighbours, were astonishingly divergent despite their earlier unity.

But with all these outside interests, and the planning for her immediate work, Daphne was distracted by her own problems. Horace had sent her a brief note, forwarded from Cadogan Square:

"What is there to say? You are too young to understand a man's nature. One day you will know what you have so lightly" (Lightly! thought Daphne) "thrown away. I shall always be ready . . . waiting . . . longing for you, wherever I am, no matter

what has happened to either of us. Buenos Aires will always find me.

"HORACE."

"As though I were a prodigal daughter," mused Daphne indignantly. This was the first word she had had from Mr. Dimock. She sickened to remember his love making, her own inclination to respond, Crystal's suffering.

Even a letter from Merton did not restore her old self-confidence. It was burned into her consciousness that she, in some way, must have been to blame. The boy wrote:

"I'm not going to bother you, Daffy-down-Dilly. You know how I feel about you, and I know, worse luck! how you feel about cousins marrying. But we go out to Vladivostock shortly. I'd be darn glad to be on the same continent with you, but after all, it's the same world. Only it would be pretty fine to think, when I'm up alone in my machine, at night, over that foreign country, that not so far away, looking up at the same stars, was the sweetest, dearest being in that world, and that she cared how I came through. Think it over, Daphne. I can't urge my claims. You know everything there is to know about me. But you haven't begun to guess what you mean to me.

"Call me all the hard names you like, so long as you don't call me cousin.

"MERTON HOWARD WHITE."

If he only weren't a cousin! or if he'd be con-

tent to stay a cousin, or a brother . . . the kindest, handsomest, straightest brother any girl ever had!

Daphne was walking along the dyke by the broad, scarcely moving river. It was twilight, a cold, clear evening, and no wind stirred in the tall bare trees by the dyke, or amongst the lopped willows. A bird flew homewards. If it had been later in the year, Daphne thought, it would have been a stork, delicate silhouette against the pale sky, bound for the next village. Some labourers passed her on their way home, heavy-going, silent men, who answered her good evening ("Goede Avond!") with a pleased, gruff "Avon', Juffrouw!"

She loved Holland, loved the Hollanders, especially in the out-of-the-way villages. There was a kind of primitive justice in life there. You worked, you ate and slept. You tried to be honest and faithful. You were kind. If the season was good, you prospered. If bad, you suffered. People far away had been at war; there had been danger for Holland too of course. Powerful countries had tried to drag Holland into that war; but they had not succeeded. There had been no war in the quiet land. And how good the coffee tasted in your little two roomed house, when the *vrouw* took a burning lump of river peat from the hearth and stuck it into the "stoofje" on which your coffee pot would stand hot and comforting!

Yes, this was the place to find peace. She did not allow herself to think of that real haven of

peace, the convent. And even the convent meant London.

She had escaped from a London hateful for the moment because it held Horace. His letter had found her out, but he would not. Indeed, it sounded as though he were already on his way to the Argentine. Had he written Crystal? Had he seen her? What a position! What a question to have to ask! Had he seen his wife? But he would be afraid to face her, and Crystal would never see him again of her own will. Such a position for a woman as proud as Crystal to find herself in! Daphne's cheeks burned as though the insult had been put upon her, not upon Crystal.

That the best woman she had ever known (except, of course, Reverend Mother; and Reverend Mother was a saint, so did not count) . . . should be the one to suffer! and that she, Daphne, to whom she had been an angel, should be the cause! And Katty . . . (as Crystal was the best, so was Katty the kindest) . . . Katty had lost Sir Blundell, and now she might lose one of her boys . . . and it was Daphne again who was making one of those boys suffer!

She stood a moment looking back at the village. The lights of the little inn reflected unendingly in the river. She did not think of them. It had revealed itself to her that she was the cause of pain in the two families she loved the best in the world, the two that had been kindest to her in the whole world.

Her three idle days at an end, Daphne plunged

into the work. Rijsdijk was not central, but the comfort of Vrouw Waaldorp's devoted care outbalanced the fatigue of her daily journeys.

In any event she must spend some days in learning the ropes, and finding where she was most needed. Her experience at the Hostel inclined her to some post where she could not only help the Flemish, but where she could be interpreter for the French-speaking Belgians as well. Comparatively few of the latter spoke Flemish, that is to say Dutch, and only the better educated amongst the Dutch spoke French.

Her letters of introduction were excellent. Even more useful was the fact that, an American lady, she had troubled to learn "Hollandsch." The Hollanders expected English and Americans to know German . . . they were always delightfully surprised to find their own language understood and spoken.

So Daphne went from Rotterdam to Utrecht, from Rijsdijk to Harden, from Rosendaal to Amsterdam. Her three hundred dollars a month made the way easy. Her connections with the Hostel enabled her to place scores of special "cases" advantageously in England and Scotland. Her friendliness smoothed the most difficult situations and, little as she realized it, her lovely face was "Open Sesame."

Soon she could write to Crystal that she was truly happy again. To Katty that her work was in a fair way to supplement the Hostel. To Merton that she was proud of him . . . he had now a cap-

taincy . . . but that he must be a beloved brother since cousin was not to his liking. To Horace she wrote not at all. Letters were not easy to Daphne, and she drew a long breath when she had handed her three to "Jan of the Post."

A few days later came a letter from Crystal.

"I envy you the charm of Rijsdijk, dearest child, but through your new environment will soon pass a curiously foreign element . . . a Serbian officer, no less! If I were asked for the most unlikely combination possible, even in this time of change, I should say, if I were wild enough to think of it, a proud young Montenegrin officer in a Rijsdijk inn . . . Dakovich in Holland! Katty has just heard from the beautiful boy. He is at the Hague, on a mission from his government. She has telegraphed him to look you up at Rijsdijk."

The rest of the letter could wait; Daphne leaned from the inn balcony, where on Sundays and holidays the good Rotterdamers and Dordrechters sat at the little tables drinking their beer or coffee . . . but on other days never a soul disturbed Vrouw van Waaldorp's quiet life. Crystal's letter of itself was certainly introducing a foreign element, Daphne thought . . . why should she pause now when so much called to be done, mooning at the river in the morning sunlight about the unknown Dakovich?

Both Crystal and Katty had talked so much of Stefan, of his beauty, his silent charm, that he lived in Daphne's mind almost as vividly as Merton or

Hazleby, with the added interest, poignancy almost, of his mysterious country. "Stefan is Serbia, Serbia is Stefan," Katty had said. He was even more than Serbia, he was Montenegro, that unconquered Serbia of wild mountains.

Daphne thought of him in Katty's luminous blue drawing room, looking down on the gay little figure of his adopted "Majka"; thought of him in the green coolness of the Pond House garden. She could even think of him in those savage mountains she had never seen, riding at the head of his men. She could evoke an image of him, clattering down the broad streets of his capital, although she had seen the lovely little city only in pictures . . . but she could not, some way, think of him in Rijsdijk.

And when she came in that evening after her long ride to her near-base of operations (she had hired a bicycle as the most practical means of getting about) . . . Vrouw van Waaldorp met her with bursting excitement.

"O Juffrouw! such a mooi man!" she began in her mixed Dutch and English. "And zeker, a son from a king! So as a king he walked in, and say he will see you, and when . . . bang (frightened) I was, zeer bang! when I open the door and show him the tafel ready for your avond maal (supper), he shiver and say, 'A fire!' Oh, so as a king he say it! 'A fire, Vrouw, quick!'"

Daphne, followed by the voluble Vrouw, had gone to her room, smoothed the braids around her head, slipped on a wide fresh collar and drawn up wide fresh cuffs.

They had no nuns in Stefan's country, or he would have thought, as Daphne opened the door of the long "zaal" and came toward him in the lamplight, that a young nun, suddenly entering a world of youth and warmth, was approaching. The room was large, bare and grey. The long white table had two glowing little "stoofjes" on it and a huge glass jug of milk. Stefan himself stood in front of the only colour (except for the coals in the "stoofjes"), in the room, the fire in the tiled stove . . . so that Daphne's slim black figure outlined itself sharply. Over the table hung a big oil lamp, covered by a white shade, and by this he could see her radiant face and the limpid blue-green eyes.

"I am sorry if I've kept you waiting, Mr. Dakovich," Daphne said, offering her hand.

Stefan lifted it to his lips. Daphne was not used to that form of salutation, and raised startled eyes to Stefan. She was a year older than he, but she felt, for the moment, ridiculously young, and a little frightened.

"So as a king!" the Vrouw had said . . . and Daphne thought to herself that she was seeing a king at last, the son of a king, rather. Great beauty in the human being is always arresting; and although the girl was prepared for the young Serbian's, she was startled. . . . The son of a king, of course, must have beauty. She searched the dark flushed proud face above her as unconsciously as Stefan in his turn searched hers. They stood thus, for several moments, the firelight on both faces.

Montenegro, but Serbia; Ireland, but America.

Young creatures do not think in terms of nationality, yet these two realised each other's strangeness. The ordinary curiosity with which boy and girl of the same people look at each other was intensified here by that intangible but underlying consciousness, the difference in race.

The kiss on her hand, however, in spite of this feeling of foreignness, had evoked in Daphne a sense of intimacy with this beautiful boy that months of acquaintance could not have given her. Even Horace's love-making, even Merton's lively adoration, had brought neither so near as that soft blurred touch on her hand.

With Stefan, this form of salutation had been a matter of education. Your Montenegrin, he had once told Lady Freke, would not kiss hands naturally . . . but young officers were expected to salute a lady so. Stefan's detachment from personalities had prevented his thinking of this more than a young American thinks of lifting his hat. Boyovich, poet and rebel, claimed for himself that he kissed no hand where a genuine affection or friendliness did not go with it. But perhaps Boyovich felt more of both emotions than the younger and colder man. At any rate, Boyovich did not appear to let his theory too much interfere with his practice.

But what indeed would even the volatile Boyovich have said at this moment if he had beheld his indifferent young friend? For Stefan, Stefan who had never loved, Stefan, who had never turned so much as a softened gaze on any woman, now lifted

Daphne's hand again, his brown eyes looking with almost infantile surprise into her green-blue ones . . . and deliberately, slowly, kissed her hand a second time.

Daphne drew her hand away quickly. She had not the courage to ask, "Is that a Montenegrin custom?" but when Stefan said, in his slow English, "Are you angry with me?" she knew she was not.

For answer she turned nervously to the table with a hurried, "You'll have supper here? I'm sorry I can't call it dinner."

Stefan had no small change in either compliments or talk. He said now only "yes," not even "thank you," and came toward the chair Daphne indicated. She took the seat at the end of the table, crossing herself when she was in her place. And Stefan asked, with grave curiosity: "You are Roman Catholic?"

"Yes. And you?"

"I am Catholic also, but orthodox."

"That is the Greek Church," Daphne said positively.

"No, the real Catholic Church, far older than the Latin branch."

Daphne looked unconvinced, but there was no time for argument. Vrouw van Waaldorp bustled in with a steaming pot of chocolate to stand on one "stoofje," and a mysterious dish of eggs and potato and ham for the other. A second white-capped, smiling head appeared behind, as Mijntje, the cook, brought in a third "stoofje" and a pile of sliced bread for toasting thereon. This she

placed in front of Stefan, and suggested by signs that he make the toast. Daphne, accustomed to the readiness with which her cousins, in their most uplifted moments, could turn a hand to any task, showed Stefan how to do this, and was frankly astonished when he shook his head.

"You don't like toast?" she asked, as the women went out.

"O yes," answered her guest, indifferently, "but I've never made it."

"You mean you won't try?" Daphne hardly believed her ears.

"No, I don't understand these matters."

Daphne meant to show a proper American indignation, but found herself caught by those serious fine eyes and held silent, charmed. It seemed only natural to make the toast herself, and to supply her guest's needs with no attention to her own. He ate little. There was no likeness to Merton's hearty appetite there! and equally unlike her cousin, he expressed no appreciation of anything he ate. Daphne thought of Merton's, of Hazleby's, noisy cheering approbation when toast was golden, or salad just right. She dressed this lettuce herself and enquired if it was to Mr. Dakovich's liking. "Too much like Mayonnaise," Stefan had said, casually, "I like a very simple dressing."

Yet neither Merton nor Hazleby could have talked as this boy did . . . of England, of France, of his own Serbia and Montenegro; gravely, finely, as though he weighed every word, like an old man, an old statesman, Daphne thought. Of France he spoke

with the tenderest veneration. "We love France!" he offered, simply. He was non-committal as to England. "Continentals do not perhaps understand islanders," he said curiously.

"You won't understand my island then," Daphne took him up, "Ireland."

"Yours? But you are American."

"No American is only American," she laughed. "Some of us went over there three hundred years ago . . . my mother's people did. Some of us yesterday . . . my grandfather emigrated to America after the Irish Famine. We're all mixed pickles. Lady Freke calls us the purest Mongrels. Is that all strange to you?"

"My family have lived on one mountain for twelve hundred years," Stefan answered.

"You would not like America, then," said Daphne, smiling.

"I never thought till this evening that I should," he said with calm directness. "Now I must see it, see them both, America and Ireland."

Daphne felt the colour rising in her face. "You may like Ireland," she stammered a little. "Lady Freke says that the Irish and the Serbians are alike."

"Yes, I know." Stefan looked at her earnestly. "I am now very happy to believe it." This made Daphne flush again. "And Mr. Dyfed . . . you know him, Mademoiselle? he says the mountains of Ireland are like my country."

After supper Daphne showed him the village

. . . in which he took not the slightest interest. Yet it was beautiful in the moonlight . . . the long tree-bordered roads, one on each side of the broad stream, a single bridge connecting them. The comfortable small houses, a "sloot" or little ditch of pure water, running by so many gardens, through so many fields; and over all the perfect luminous arch of the Holland sky.

But his eyes never once left Daphne's face. He asked her a thousand questions, simply, earnestly, as a child might, with the child's calm insistence. And Daphne in turn found herself enquiring as minutely into his life and thoughts. Always the feeling grew in her that he needed care . . . this confident tall officer; that for all his superbly accepting life and service "so as a king," he was but a little boy.

The lights had long since disappeared in the village. Now they went out one by one in the inn . . . only one burned, from a "zaal" window. So Daphne decided against a longer stroll. Coming in, fresh and rosy from the cold night air, they found that the Vrouw had left out a jug of milk and a honey cake. Daphne rose to say good night when they had eaten, but Stefan, lighting a cigarette, said, without a "by your leave," "No. Stay till I have smoked this."

Daphne looked at him quizzically. He was certainly a new experience. And he as unquestionably found her so. In spite of his assured manner, his tranquil giving of orders, he turned such touchingly confident and beautiful eyes upon her as almost to dazzle her. He walked about the room, talking

or silent. When she spoke he stood above her, so tall a figure! or sat eagerly close by, bringing that bewildering face near hers. It was all a surprising sensation for the would-be nun.

But when the cigarette was finished she rose firmly.

"Not one more?" he pleaded, taking out a fresh cigarette.

"No, Monsieur, not half one, nor quarter. But tell me . . . you are leaving early tomorrow?"

"At nine. I have business at the Hague. And in the evening I cross to London."

Daphne was surprised. "Why didn't you tell me?" but she laughed her own answer. "We've talked too much to say anything! How long shall you be in England?"

"Only twenty-four hours. I have a message for Madame . . . the Lady of the Pond House."

"For Crystal? For Mrs. McClinton?"

"Yes, from my friend Captain Boyovich. He saw her once."

"Only once?" Daphne was frankly curious. "Yet you must take all that time, when you are hurrying back to Serbia, for a message to Crystal?"

"I think he loves her," said Stefan simply.

Daphne looked at him incredulously. "Loves her? When he has seen her only once?"

"Why not? He is a poet. And Madame is beautiful."

"O she's more than that," Daphne cried. "She's an angel of goodness. But . . . you must know a person . . . you can't fall in love in one day!"

"I can." The boy regarded her with the same babyish surprise he had shown when he had kissed her hand. "I have not had a day yet." He turned his wrist to see the watch there. "I have known you three hours, Mademoiselle, and I love you. I have never loved any woman before, except my sisters and the new 'Majka,' Lady Freke."

Daphne was by the door. He had followed, and stood looking down at her. Amazement was her main sensation, and a curious feeling that a gift of astonishing value and loveliness was being handed to her. She had seen the eyes of two men recently in a similar moment . . . passion in Horace's, devouring adoration in Merton's . . . but in Stefan's something different . . . a sort of illuminated happiness and candour. She could no more have hurt him that moment than she could have struck a child.

"You extraordinary boy!" she said at last. "I feel like your mother."

"Yes, I feel too that you are partly my mother," Stefan said gravely. "You are not annoyed with me?"

"Annoyed!" Daphne smiled. "No. Astounded!"

"Will you write to me?" Stefan pursued, his eyes never leaving her face.

"Yes . . . but I write stupid letters."

"I shall not care . . . if you will write . . . every day?"

"Every week," amended Daphne.

"Shall I send you my picture?" the "extraordi-

nary boy" went on. "I am afraid you will not remember me without it." He did not ask for hers . . . but, still studying her closely, he explained, "I do not need a picture of you. I shall not forget your face, living or dying."

Dying . . . Daphne realised to what he was returning. He had told her what new dangers threatened his exhausted country.

"You must live, not die," she said with the clear-voiced authority one shows only to the best beloved.

"I do not think I can die now . . . now that I have seen you," Stefan answered.

There was a knock at the door, and Daphne said hastily, "The poor Vrouw! I didn't think she would wait up for us."

"Send her away," commanded Stefan.

"I shall send you away," laughed the girl. "Upstairs to bed, sir! Good night."

Stefan drew her hand to his lips, looking at her as he did so. He held the hand there an appreciable moment.

"Good night!" he said.

CHAPTER XXIV

SERBIA IN LOVE

NEXT morning Daphne gave him his breakfast. With the Vrouw and Mijntje, delightedly voluble, hovering about them, they had little chance for more than the briefest sentences.

It was a shimmering opalescent morning, such as only the low lying country can offer, where the eternal mists drift from the river and the little "sloots." Frosty sunlight glinted on the stream outside the "zaal" windows, and was in turn reflected dancingly on the pale walls. In this early light the young Montenegrin was more freshly handsome than ever. "It is a mooi man!" the Vrouw whispered whenever she could get a word to Daphne . . . "Oh, zoo mooi!" ("Oh, so good looking!")

When they were left alone for a few moments, Stefan smiled at her across the table. "What are you thinking?" he asked.

"I am wondering," Daphne replied frankly, "what you are thinking of me?"

"I cannot find the right words to tell you," said Stefan. "Perhaps you will one day learn Serbian, and then you will understand me."

"Can two people, speaking different languages, ever understand each other?" enquired the girl.

"It doesn't matter," Stefan responded with his grandest air. "I adore you. That is all that matters."

"You adore me, and you don't even," Daphne laughed aloud, "you don't even know my name!"

"It is Mademoiselle O'Brien!" said the boy triumphantly. "I know it from Lady Freke's telegram: 'Go to Rijsdijk. Enquire for my niece, Mademoiselle O'Brien. Write me news of her. Always my love. Majka.'" He repeated the message word for word, and both young creatures laughed, looking at each other with unreserved pleasure.

"Mademoiselle O'Brien," went on Stefan, "that is, to say it in Serbian, Gospodja Brienich."

"And shall I say 'Mr. O'Dak,' in English-Irish?" retorted Daphne.

"No. Will you say 'Stefan,' if you like that name?"

"I surely do," Daphne replied. "And my name . . . just in case you ever wished to know! is Daphne."

"Daphne!" and when she had spelled it, he said happily, "Greek!—I am very glad it is a name I know" . . . and quoted, carefully,

"O sweetly blooming Daphne!"

And as the Vrouw entered at that instant, to say that the tram could be heard . . . it always whistled

upon approaching the village . . . there was no time for any but the shortest farewells. Daphne smiled a little wistfully, as he kissed her hand . . . kissed it twice. He had left no address, no directions for letters, no idea as to his plans; it was not like an American boy. Yet with what eyes he looked at her!

The Vrouw and Mijntje were waiting outside with his bag near the tram's stopping place.

"You mustn't be late," Daphne adjured him, for he stood in the doorway of the inn, whither he had followed her, looking down at her while the tram, which had come in, whistled for departure.

"They will wait," he said, as though it were natural for trams and all else to wait upon his convenience. And added, with his beautiful eyes studying her keenly, "I shall write you all I cannot say. I can say only one thing now . . . I love you . . . Daphne."

The girl smiled up at him. "Good-bye, Stefan!"

He stepped from the sheltering doorway into the sunlit road, and, drawing himself up all of his six feet two, saluted her formally, and walked to the waiting tram. The few villagers hanging about gaped after him. He had evidently forgotten to settle his account, and now thrust some paper money into the Vrouw's hand, and a florin into Mijntje's. The two women waved excitedly and called farewells to him, but he did not look back.

Daphne, walking out to the inn balcony, leaned a long time against the rail, gazing across the river and over the bare trees toward Rotterdam, whither

the tram was taking him; thinking of what had happened, and spellbound by the new splendour of the world.

Lady Freke had the amusing sensation next morning of seeing her son and her adopted son together at the Hostel. Both in khaki, although the intense black collar of the Serbian uniform made the face above it more glowing than the American's. She looked at them with extraordinary pleasure, but scenting danger, for their manner, as they saluted each other, was not friendly. Perhaps this was because Merton, American fashion, would have shaken hands, but the other was oblivious. It was not his custom.

Merton came to announce his own and Hazleby's immediate departure for New York. And to ask how he could see Tante Crystal. Was she coming up that day? No?

If Lady Freke set her teeth together, neither boy saw it. To America, then to Siberia! both her boys! But she said gently to Stefan, "And why has my adopted son come to England?"

"I carry a message for Madame, your sister," the young Montenegrin answered. "I must deliver it in person."

Lady Freke was as surprised as Daphne had been.

"Suppose we wire her to come up to town?" Merton suggested. "We'll kill two birds with one ninepence."

But Stefan said, inexplicably, as it seemed, "No,

I must deliver my message in the Pond House garden, or in some other equally beautiful place."

Merton would have said, like his English friends, "Tommy rot!" but a glance at the stranger's face stopped him.

"It is not for myself," he smiled disarmingly at Merton. "It is for my friend . . . a solemn mission."

"Sure!" Merton answered cordially. "I'll drive you down. And, Mater, you'll wait here for old Hazleby? Then tonight we can all dine together. Haze and I don't sail until tomorrow."

"You are kind," said Stefan, seeing that he was included. "But I must leave England tonight."

While Merton swung off to telegraph their coming to the Pond House, Lady Freke asked if Stefan had seen Daphne? The light in his eyes answered and surprised her.

"I can never thank you, Majka," the boy replied, after smiling at her for a long moment. "I am different from yesterday, from all other days. I have seen your niece, and I love her. Are you pleased?"

Katty knew now why she had apprehended danger . . . it was danger to Merton's happiness.

"Are you sure, Stefan? It's a serious business. How about Daphne?"

"I told her. She was not angry. You are not, Majka?"

"No, no," his adopted majka answered hastily, and fell silent. How much was it going to hurt Merton? Yet Daphne had told her, and as she knew, had told Merton, that she could never marry

a cousin, even if she loved him. And she did not love Merton . . . Katty was sure of that. She looked again at the radiant young strange figure before her.

"I love you as my own son, Stefan," she said at last.

"Yes, Majka, and because I believe that I can tell you now."

"And some way, often when I have thought of you or Daphne, I have thought of you together."

"Is that the reason you told me to find her in Holland?"

"I suppose so," responded Lady Freke slowly. *"Chi lo sa?"*

"I think we were born the two parts of one whole." Stefan put it as much to himself as to her.

"But when shall you see her again?" said Katty.

"Not for many months. I have written to her. I was up all night on the boat to write this letter," and he drew it out confidingly as he asked, "Is that her correct name?"

"Heavenly!" laughed Lady Freke, "to have to ask the aunt-in-law of your beloved what her name is!"

"I am fortunate to have a majka and a wife who love each other," Stefan smiled at her adorably.

"A wife, you infant! And this an upset world: war ahead of us all for no one knows how long!"

"We marry early in Serbia," answered the boy, "that there may be children and grandchildren for us. And Captain Boyovich has told me it will be well for me to marry an American. And more . . .

the night before I saw . . . Daphne . . . I dreamed that I walked in Cetinje, with a lady beside me. She was veiled. I thought it meant that I must marry a Turkish girl. But when I saw your niece I knew it was for her I had dreamed."

"Do dreams come true in Montenegro?" teased Katty.

"Of course!" Stefan answered in some surprise.

Merton returned, pulling on his gloves. "I've got a car," he said. "We'll be at the Pond House in time to feed, and back by five o'clock. Old Haze will take you out for lunch, Mater, and I for dinner."

He kissed his mother and started toward the door.

Lady Freke laid her hand detainingly on Stefan's arm. "Do not talk of Daphne to Merton," she said. "He loves her, too . . . and there is no use in making him unhappy."

"You are the only one I can speak with about her," Stefan answered. "You and Boyovich. Thank you for all, Majka. I shall write you, as always. And you will explain me to Daphne?" He kissed her hand and followed Merton.

Their telegram found Crystal in her orchard, discussing the spring planting with Shepherd. There must be enough not only for their own needs for the year, but to supply the Hostel.

"And if I go to America, Shepherd," Mrs. McClinton said, "I shall leave it to you to give away whatever's most needed in the village."

For she was seriously contemplating a year's

residence at home to enable her to divorce Horace. She believed she could do this on the ground of his desertion, if she remained there the twelve months, and he did not return during that time.

She walked away now from good old Shepherd, considering her telegram. Merton said that he was bringing down Serbia, and hoped for a pigeon pie and junket, for "the last luncheon," he said irreverently. That meant he was soon going to leave England. And having given Mrs. Rumbold "Master Merton's" request, Crystal went back to her garden.

That green shelter was still both sweetened and embittered by its associations with Horace. He had written her desperately after Daphne's disappearance, throwing himself on her mercy, entreating her to give him news of the girl.

She had answered only: "I promised Daphne not to let you know her whereabouts, and if you wrote to send you the enclosed. C."

The "enclosed," which Daphne had asked Crystal to read and seal, was a note, on the envelope of which she had written, "To be sent to Mr. Horace Dimock, if he tries to learn where I am."

Inside was one sentence: "I only hate you now, but if you try to find me I shall despise you. Daphne O'Brien."

"There's a holy nun for you!" Horace had probably thought. But he had not gone on, Crystal imagined, with his search. It would have been easy enough to trace her. And very likely he had

been about to put the matter into a detective's hands. But he wrote now almost tenderly to Crystal:

"I shall not pursue Daphne. You may count on my hiding my wounds in dignity and silence. And as we have both suffered, my dear girl, suppose we agree to forgive and forget? I return by this week's steamer to Buenos Aires. You can always reach me there by cable or letter. I shall look upon it as a sacred obligation to respond to any call you make upon me, now or in the future. We both owe something to the ideal days of our past happiness.

"HORACE."

It was stupendous, Crystal thought; but while she could smile at the calm egotism of Horace's assumptions, she turned for the first time to the thought of divorce. It was too humiliating to be bound, even by a merely legal and unpublished tie. She had no so-called religious scruples as to divorce . . . only a nice woman's repugnance to the implied vulgarity, an honest one's revolt against failing to keep even a one-sided bargain.

But it was all sordid and poor . . . the gold of affection turned to this dross. Crystal felt her own self-respect as sullied as though she had been down into a muddy and stagnant back water, when she had thought to find herself in the clean rolling breakers.

What could now give back her old sense of the purity and freshness of living? Must she wear down this feeling of defilement? Would only time re-

turn to her that earlier pride of which she was conscious now that it was gone?

Alas! She remembered that that very pride had been the result of a man's love offered her . . . first Alexander's, then Horace's. One isn't proud in oneself. One is proud because one is loved. And she was forty . . . a middle aged woman (Alicia would call her elderly), whom no one would love again.

There came into her mind something Katty had said: "The world is to the young in new countries. In old ones it is to the old." Must she go back to the new to put off the last link with youth? And then return to the old to lapse into elderly insignificance?

Crystal had never resented growing old as Katty did . . . as Peter Norton and Aileen and Meredith Dyfed said they did. Nor had she envied youth. Even in the first bitterness of learning that it was Daphne whom Horace had elected to love in her place, she had not envied the girl her smooth skin, her slenderness . . . for what was youth except that? But now she did. Was it because she longed to see herself reflected once more in a man's adoring eyes? . . . Shame!

No, she was on the way to be, as Alicia said, "elderly," like some of her Yonkers friends. She smiled a little ruefully, thinking what those ladies would say to each other if they knew that "Mrs. McClinton, whom I actually once visited, wanted to be . . . *loved!* at *her* age!"

A motor horn interrupted these reflections, and

she hurried toward the gate. The "Serbia" Merton was bringing . . . would it be the beautiful boy Stefan, or his tragic friend, Captain Boyovich?

But it was Stefan's tall figure that came up the path to meet her, saluting her with a gayer smile than she had thought his dark face equal to, and lifting her hand to his lips as though she were a queen.

Merton followed, pulling off his great coat to throw his arms about her as he kissed her resoundingly.

It was youth again: in its liveliest aspect, on Merton's part, in its most romantically handsome on the young Serb's. The former went at once in search of his little cousins, and Stefan, to her great surprise, asked if he might have a half hour with her, quite undisturbed?

"But luncheon will soon be ready," Crystal said perplexedly.

"After that, of course. I have a letter for you. I am to deliver it when you are not interrupted, and in the most beautiful place I can find."

"That is like something out of a book," Crystal smiled.

"It is from a poet, Madame," answered her guest.

From Boyovich, then, the *guslar,* poor wild little man! had he written her a poem? He had composed several for Katty. She wished he had come too, she told Stefan; and Bedelia and Bobby, when they were seated at table, clamoured to know why the other officer was not there? Bedelia and Ri-Ri sat one on each side of Merton, while Bobby and Chou-

Chou divided Stefan. It was rather a surprise to see how tender the tall, abstracted young foreigner was with the small boys. It was natural enough for Merton to love children . . . he always had. . . . Then she remembered that Boyovich had seemed fond of them. "Was it a Serbian characteristic to love children?" she asked Stefan.

"Almost a national impulse," said Stefan, smiling.

After the meal Merton offered to give the children a ride in his car.

"Dakovich tells me he must see you on business, Tante Crystal," he said. "I can take the kiddies off your hands for an hour."

"You are very kind," Stefan said to him in his serious way. And when the noisy load had disappeared, he repeated to Crystal, "He is very kind . . . I think he is a good man."

They were walking up the orchard path to the raised seat under the old apple tree. "I fancy that it is the most beautiful place at this hour," said his hostess, "but why are you limited as to position?"

"Because my Boyovich, as perhaps you remember, loves Nature. He has an idea that Nature and Love are interchangeable terms."

"Yes," Crystal recalled it. . . . "He even said when he was here that there was no such thing as enjoying Nature without Love, or understanding Love without Nature."

As they seated themselves, Stefan said, looking over the grey and brown meadows toward the blue

Chiltern Hills, "I believe this is as beautiful as he himself would choose." . . . And then, quite formally, "Madame, I have the honour to deliver this letter. It is in English. You must pardon the errors. . . . Boyovich finds it difficult . . . he had to ask me many words . . . and I am not too good myself."

The letter was addressed in an obviously un-English hand, but in a frank, rather handsome, writing, "To the Lady at the Pond House, Oxfordshire."

As she opened it, Stefan lighted a cigarette and walked away. He did not look at her, but Crystal had the feeling he was miles from there . . . in his own country, with the friend who here wrote to her so strangely:

"My gold hand, that can do all things. My gold heart, that understands all things . . . *morituri salutamo!* I have seen you, Madame, only once, but to a poet it is given to see more clearly than to other men. I cannot write your name. English names are impossible to us. But in my heart your name is the Beloved, the Beautiful. I have lived thirty years, and always for my art or my country. Until I saw you in your garden I knew not Love.

"Now I have dreamed that I shall soon see Death. Perhaps I am fortunate. Surely that man has great fortune who dies for his country, and perhaps you would never have bid me live for Love.

"Stefan, my friend who brings this to you, is young, but to be trusted in all things. He is Montenegrin, and the other half of my soul. I pray that his for-

tune will be better than mine. If he lives through this time, I pray he may marry a woman of your race, and have many sons to help Serbia. Our race is old. And for a moment, exhausted. Yours is new and vigorous. I commend him to your gold heart.

"With this I send a bit of rosemary. In our country a bride wears rosemary. Perhaps you will keep it and say sometimes, 'This came from Boyovich, who died for a country that will never die, and dying he called not only, 'O Serbia!' but 'O Beloved!'

"I kiss your hand, my gold hand.

"Pavlo Boyovich."

Was it not this she had wished for even as it was on its way to her?

She read the letter again . . . and then again, unconscious that the boy was observing her. . . . Then she leaned forward, thinking. There was neither address nor date on the page. She knew by instinct that this was characteristic of Boyovich. When Stefan, in his leisurely walk about the orchard, came near her again, she asked if he knew when the letter was written?

"Just four weeks ago," he answered. "I could not come sooner."

"Have you heard from him since?" said Crystal, wishing to ask if he still lived.

"I have heard nothing." Stefan looked earnestly at her, as though he awaited further questions. And when she asked none, he continued,

"There is no fighting for the moment. But we know it will soon begin again. And Boyovich thinks he will be killed."

Crystal longed to ask if he knew what was in the letter, but she could not.

"His thinking so does not mean that he will be," she ventured finally.

"A man knows it in his heart when he is soon to die," Stefan answered simply.

"Have you the same sort of a presentiment?" Crystal demanded.

"Not now!" and the young officer smiled down on her so radiantly it was almost as though he told her he was loved. Yet Katty had said, "If tragedy overhangs that boy!" and how much more he was marked for tragedy than his friend, irresponsible, absurd Boyovich!

Crystal reproached herself for thinking of the *Guslar* as absurd . . . in the face, too, of his touching letter. Did she not owe to him that very solace her heart had cried out for not three hours before? "a man's love offered her?"

"What shall I say in answer to my friend, if I see him again?" asked Stefan gently.

"Say . . . say I am honoured beyond what I deserve." Crystal realised how inadequate this was. . . . "That is a poor response. Shall I write to him?"

Stefan paused before speaking. "It seems ungracious to say 'No,' " he answered finally. "But I understand my Boyovich. He likes, once he has his own vision of anything, to keep it as it is . . . a letter would trouble that vision. And he would have difficulty in comprehending the English."

"Then tell me what you will say, in any event?" begged Crystal.

"I shall say—always if I see him again—that I saw you in your garden, under the brown trees, —in white, the sky cold but blue. I'll say that you read his letter slowly, and several times . . . and that in your eyes there were tears. That is what I shall say, Madame."

"I can't make it better," Crystal smiled softly at him. "I can only wish him, in spite of everything, a happy life."

"No. Wish him a good death," the young Montenegrin answered quietly.

The two boys left at three. As they stood by the car, buttoning their heavy coats, for the wind would be against them, a melancholy procession approached . . . the four children, Bedelia first, draped in a long black scarf, and carrying a little box. The three small boys followed, with lugubrious strips of black tied around their left arms.

"Darlings!" expostulated Crystal. "We don't send our soldiers off with gloomy expressions."

"It's not for them," Bedelia answered succinctly. "You can see that we are carrying flags of joy for them." And indeed Chou-Chou was now discovered to be bearer of a variety of little Allied and American flags. "No. It's for Obadiah."

"Is he dead?" Crystal asked, really shocked.

"Oh, no. He is in this box. But since two real live officers are starting a new war, and we are sure they are going to be killed . . ."

"Killed dead, Mummie," interpolated Bobby. "Nuffing left of vem."

"Ssh, Bobby! And before they're killed," continued Miss McClinton, "I thought I ought to give them my very bestest present."

"Obadiah is her bestest. But I find that très gentille in Bedil," put in Ri-Ri approvingly.

"You bet your bottom dollar it is!" agreed Merton. "You're a good sport, Bedelia! You'd give the gold filling out of your teeth if you had any."

"My teeth are not filled," said literal Chou-Chou, "but I also have a present" (producing with obvious reluctance, a toy pop-gun).

"And I! Mine is to make them to be gay!" Ri-Ri here handed a mouth organ.

"But mine is to be cast on a desert island wiv," Bobby said eagerly. "If vey is hungry and go fishing. It's worms for bait. I digged vem myself."

"Great Godfrey!" ejaculated Merton, diving suddenly behind his car.

As the small Belgians had thrust their gifts into Merton's hands, Bobby now insisted upon Stefan's taking his extremely loathsome little handkerchief, in which he said all of "nine dear little worms were wiggling."

"But, Madame!" appealed Stefan.

"Oh, it is all right, Monsieur!" Ri-Ri encouraged him, "you can easily divide the presents."

"But they can't divide Obadiah!" Crystal saw a way out.

"No," said Bedelia. "But they can take turns carrying him. And the one he likes the most must

keep him. Obadiah knows his own mind, Mrs. Rumbold says."

Merton by now had himself in hand, and came to the rescue. "Of course," he stated with becoming seriousness, "both Mr. Dakovich and I are very much obliged. And we accept with the greatest pleasure. But now will you do something more for us? Will you keep all the presents for us till we both return?"

"But you go to be killed!" objected Chou-Chou.

"Yes, of course. But in that case we'd leave them to you in our wills. Isn't that right, Dakovich?"

"That is right," Stefan responded, also seriously.

A much relieved little group now said the cheeriest of farewells. Merton, with a last violent hug, releasing Crystal, jumped into his seat. Stefan kissed not only Crystal's hand, but Bedelia's, and saluting all three little boys in turn, followed Merton. The car slid away, the most diabolical toots of its strident horn proclaiming the departure.

And Bedelia, looking rapturously into the pink eyes of Obadiah, said deeply,

"It's almost as if we had been to a war, too!"

CHAPTER XXV

A LONG WAY

"ARE you going to stand by Serbia, Peter?"

Norton looked at Lady Freke with haggard eyes. They were lunching in a quiet little restaurant near the Hostel. Peter had come in to her desk to tell her that they had news of Alicia . . . that she had shell shock . . . no actual injury but a bad case of nerves.

And because Peter himself looked like death, Katty had insisted on his going out to eat with her at this queer, sombre but blessedly quiet little place. Allen Pearce had found it—and indeed, Allen himself came in just as they chose a table.

"Have your chop here with us, Allen," Katty suggested, but Allen rumbled back, "I'll wager you and Norton don't often have a quiet chat. Besides, I'm expecting Meredith Dyfed here directly."

Norton murmured, "Good boy, good boy, Allen!" and the painter left them.

"Who can say, Katty?" Peter went on, answering her question as if there had been no interruption. "You know how strongly I've always felt about Serbia. They called me in at the War Office and at the Admiralty to ask for advice they never took, on Serbia as on other things. Our government

never cleared up their own situation in the Balkans. Even France seems to understand matters out there better than we. Yet any road to the East is our business, not France's."

"But what will England do about Fiume?" Katty persisted.

"My God! I don't know." Norton bent his head on his hand.

"Eat your omelette, Peter. It's Spanish, the kind you like. And I'll tell you what Stefan writes. He says they will not move so long as no hand is laid on that Dalmatian coast. But that, if one inch of that beloved soil is taken from them, every man in Serbia and Montenegro will fight. Halt, maimed,—Stefan says the dead will rise to fight beside their brothers."

Norton's eyes shone as they always did when they saw heroism. "I know, I know, Katty. 'The country that never dies.'"

Here Meredith Dyfed entered, and, seeing them, came to their table.

"Poor Frank Morrill had his man telephone me that his wife died this morning," he said.

"Lady Morrill gone!" Norton and Katty were equally astounded.

"The one person who seemed predestined to a long and commonplace existence!" said Peter.

"A stroke of some sort," surmised Katty. "Poor Francis Morrill! It was always a mismating, but now he'll hate the ugly fact of death, and more . . . he'll reproach himself, how unnecessarily!"

Peter and Dyfed looked at her with interest.

They were both wondering if she realised that, for Sir Francis Morrill, the sun rose and set in herself.

Evidently not, for she said, "Shall I telephone him, or only telegraph? I don't know him intimately as you men do."

"Yes, telephone," Dyfed said. "It will be right if you do it. I shall telegraph, as will Norton, I fancy."

"But Serbia?" Katty went back to it when Dyfed turned away. "Don't think me heartless, Peter. You know as well as I do that it's the great release for Francis Morrill."

"It's another break in the circle," said Norton gently.

"You know what Blundell always called her?" (For Katty knew he was thinking of her own loss.) "'Our upholstered friend.' Shame on me to remember it! But I've the right to be light minded —and to you, my friend—we being the only heavy hearts."

"The individual sorrow mustn't count, even now . . . not when a whole nation can be sacrificed."

"Is Serbia to be sacrificed? Speak, Oracle!"

"I was never less oracular," Peter answered her. "I don't sleep o' nights for thinking of Serbia. But Western conditions have hypnotised England. Francis Morrill has realised the other side . . . it's part of his bitterness that he's never been listened to. He at least has always said that we were in a stupid way to incur the undying resentment of that little country."

"Undying resentment is Gilbertian—of a country as near dead as Serbia has been!" Katty flamed. "O England! what stupidities are committed in thy name!" She forgot poor Peter's omelette. "It's on a par with your grandly trying now to make a present of Home Rule to Ireland when Ireland has already taken the present with a club!"

"Spare us, O Madame O'Roland!"

"'Tis your fault they've got out of hand over there," Katty said gravely. "'Tis a nasty business to have Ireland kicking down your back door, all because a big man refuses a lot of gay boys the right to wave their own flag. Why haven't you let them make speeches and wave flags over there? Your Sinn Fein troubles are of your own making."

"Pax, Katty! 'By their blunders shall you know them!'"

"Well, you blunder like good sports. Even our German friends recognised that," said Katty; and repeated a story current during the war, but, curiously, unknown to Peter . . . the German officer's speech to the Englishman. "You'll always be fools . . . but *we'll* never be gentlemen!"

"What can an Irishman offer an Englishman to match that?" laughed Peter, as he walked along after luncheon with her.

"'Sure, you'll always be gentlemen, of a sort!'" retorted Lady Freke. "'God help you . . . and us!' That's what he can offer."

Norton went a long way with her. He was restless and very pale.

"It is curious to go back to our own small problems," Katty hazarded, for she knew he was worrying about his only child. "After five years of world concerns."

"Yes, I'm thinking of Alicia," Norton replied. "I suppose Lady Morrill's going is a tremendous shock. We thought we had done with death."

"You mean Alicia will perhaps refuse to come home?"

"Exactly. She'll stick it out there at any cost."

"She's your own child, Peter."

Norton left her at Paddington, where she was to meet Crystal. Katty tried to put him out of her mind as she paced the platform waiting for Crystal's train. He meant Ireland to her at that moment . . . and Sinn Fein had made it hard for our Home Ruler to think of Ireland with patience. . . . Just as the close of the war had made it hard to remember Belgium, so now she meant to ignore Ireland. And Serbia . . . that was different . . . one wasn't "fed up," to quote her boys, with Serbia.

Crystal asked her, almost as soon as they reached Cadogan Square, if she really needed her for a while. "I think I must go to America for a few weeks," she said.

"Must you, Crystal? Business?" Katty asked.

"Not exactly . . . but there are things to enquire into." (She was going to "enquire" into divorcing Horace! *What* would Katty say to that?) "I wish Daphne were here," she continued. "I

could leave the kiddies . . . only four now—the little Belgian boys and my two . . . with such an easy mind."

"Daphne's rather likely to return," Katty said. "The Adriatic situation may change things in Serbia," she went on, the connection clearer to herself than to her sister. Crystal did not know that news of Serbia, that is to say of Stefan, would be easier to obtain in England than in Holland.

But to Crystal, Serbia meant Boyovich. It was a month now since Stefan had brought her that extraordinary and lovely letter . . . would she not have heard if he were no longer living?

"Poor Serbia!" she said aloud.

"Astounding Serbia!" Katty responded. "Wonderful Belgium! Unhappy Ireland!"

"It's a descending scale, little sister," Crystal smiled at the incorrigible Home Ruler.

"In the present estimation, yes," Lady Freke agreed. "In my own individual feeling, no. I admire the Belgians. I reverence the Serbs. I wish to *be* Irish."

"And you *are* American!" Crystal took her up. "And couldn't be anything else."

That evening, as they made plans for the summer (Katty hoped to go out to Belgrade), Grimmer brought in a telegram.

Katty read it sadly.

"Stefan's 'angry gods' are surely frowning," she said, as she passed the telegram to Crystal. "Poor Boyovich!"

Boyovich! It had come, then. The message was from Daphne, to say, in the concise form that foreign telegrams incline to, that she was returning, that she would go to Crystal, that Boyovich was dead.

Crystal looked a long time into the fire. She did not think at first that it was curious the news should have come through Daphne. Poor wild, brave *guslar!* Stefan had told her long ago that he had won five medals for bravery in action—that when he went into battle, that frail poet, playing madly on his *gusle,* his company followed him like fiends aroused. And perhaps it had happened thus —a glorious end for the strange, rapt, blue-eyed Montenegrin! Yet now there were no battles . . . nominally, at any rate, there was peace.

"Wish him a good death!" Stefan said.

"And I could wish him only a happy life!" Crystal spoke aloud without meaning to.

Katty studied her. "Tell me, if you will, Crystal," she said. "I knew when Stefan came to England solely to see you that there was something."

"I suppose it isn't betraying a confidence now," Crystal answered. The "Howard girls" had always practised a scrupulous reserve, even between themselves, as to other people's affairs.

"No. Tell me," Katty urged.

"Captain Boyovich wrote me a wonderful letter," Crystal said. "Quite beautiful—to say that he had dreamed he would soon 'see death.' And that he . . . it was absurd . . . he had never laid eyes

upon me except that one time when you brought him down to the Pond House . . ."

"That he loved you?" Katty finished for her. "I guessed it. Did you write him, Crystal?"

"No. Mr. Dakovich thought it would disturb him more than my silence."

"The poet in him! A nation of poets," Katty mused. "And Boyovich gone from their number!"

"The angry gods, indeed!" Crystal answered.

CHAPTER XXVI

PRIMROSE TIME

Crystal did not summon courage enough before she sailed to tell Katty her reason for going. It would be easier to write it to her when she knew the divorce was possible, and then she could tell her the whole story . . . or let Daphne do so.

Meanwhile the girl arrived from Holland, so soft a radiance in her face, so deep a kindness in her clear eyes, that Crystal, meeting her at the station, exclaimed,

"Daphne, child! you're altered . . . what is it?"

"It's not for the worse, Crystal?"

"Worse! a thousand times for the better. Have you found your work, my dear?"

"My real vocation? Yes. And there's no doubt of it this time . . . if only I'm equal to it! O Crystal! I've found something so wonderful, so dazzling!"

Crystal's heart stood still for a moment. Did Daphne mean she had forgiven Horace? But the girl would not be regarding her with those limpid untroubled eyes, if her happiness signified Crystal's suffering.

"Why do you suppose I came back to you, Crystal, and not to Katty?"

"Many ties bind us, my child," answered her friend, though she meant only one: the anguish Horace had caused.

"And more than ever now!" Daphne had taken the older woman's hand, and held it against her cheek. "I knew about Captain Boyovich, even before you did."

"His death? Yes . . . how *did* you know that, Daphne?"

"No, his loving you. Stefan told me. And then his death. Stefan told me both."

"Stefan! Then Stefan is your vocation?"

"Stefan, the friend of Boyovich," assented Daphne, solemnly. "And Boyovich adored you, you lovely Crystal! And now Stefan adores me. At least he says he does."

"Daphne O'Brien! I don't know when anything has given me such absolute extraordinary pleasure! You and the beautiful boy. . . . Katty's Ireland and Serbia! And you didn't write me!"

"I so wished to tell you, Crystal! I thought if I didn't share the most beautiful thing that ever happened to me with you . . . after . . ."

"After the ugliest, yes, I know, child." Crystal pressed her hand.

"I was going to say the most serious, meaning my coming out of the convent, and the most futile, my listening to Horace," Daphne changed this.

"And you would not have come back if Captain Boyovich had not been killed?" Crystal questioned.

"O Crystal, if I had known you needed me, I would have come back from Timbuctoo! But

you've never said you did . . . only, when Stefan wrote that his hero was killed, I could not keep away from *you,* whom the hero worshipped! It's as though Stefan were your brother, and Boyovich were mine . . . is that far-fetched, dearest?"

"It's darling of you, far-fetched or not. And, as it happens, I need you in the most practical fashion. Will you take charge of the Pond House and the children . . . all four of them, poor Daphne! and let me go to Yonkers?"

Of course Daphne was both willing and delighted. Crystal completed her arrangements, "As if goin' to them oncivilised parts was no more'n over Bittums," expostulated Mrs. Rumbold . . . and left the next Saturday. She wrote Horace a formal note to say that she was going to New York (he was there at that moment, as she knew) to set the machinery in motion for divorce. She assumed that he would leave before her arrival, so that there would be no interference with the grounds on which she proposed securing the divorce . . . desertion . . . and signed herself (for the first time in their relation, she thought cynically) "Crystal Howard Dimock."

She was fortunate in a quick crossing. It seemed no time at all before she wrote Daphne that getting the divorce would mean a fixed residence for the plaintiff . . . herself . . . in one place; and proof of one year's desertion on the part of the defendant . . . Horace . . . And that, alas! she must go out to Nevada, as six months' residence would suffice there.

Daphne went about in a dream. Nothing was real to her except the scant news of Serbia in the morning paper. Not a word from Stefan. His last letter had been written on the eve of some mysterious departure. The news from the Dalmatian coast was scant and incomprehensible. It was there that Boyovich was killed.

"A great soul wasted in a little cause," Stefan had written in that last letter. "Yet my Boyovich knew that he must soon fall. I shall not fall, my Daphne. Or, if you see me fall in your dreams, be sure that I shall stagger to my feet, and at some time, in some manner, return to you!"

After that, silence.

The Pond House hummed like a hive, "With Daffy-down-Dilly the queen bee!" said Bedelia, quoting Merton. Two little McClintons, two de Wiarts, Miss Tuckett, Mrs. Rumbold, Ivy and Ada, not to speak of Finn McCoul, Alicia Mooney and Obadiah, made a handful for even the capable Daphne.

Katty and the Nortons came down once or twice. Letters from Hazleby and Alicia so openly, gaily, in love it made the others rather quiet and tender. Daphne was not envious. Stefan would never be like Hazleby, she said to Katty (the only person beside Crystal and Merton who knew about him). He would never surround her with those unceasing and enchanting attentions with which Hazleby would garland his beloved's way . . . he was the one to

be surrounded. "In a way I shall be making up to him for what his country has suffered," Daphne said. "I shall always see in him a great and tortured nation personified. . . . His beauty will always remind me of a lovely country already classic before America was even discovered! And his aloofness doesn't mean that he loves me less, but his ideals more."

But sweetly as her thoughts enabled her to rise above her present loneliness, she was thankful that Merton, poor Merton, was away. She had written him about Stefan. . . . He had taken it as Merton would—very simply and bravely, wishing her, in his answer, all that good luck that no one deserved as did his dear Daffy-down-Dilly.

It was late February when a telegram announced Crystal's unexpected return. Her trip to Nevada must have been made at a rate of speed Mrs. Rumbold, when shown the map, and given the number of miles as worked out by Bedelia and Ri-Ri, declared with a sniff, to be "that onlikely she was fair ashamed of Miss Bedelia tryin' to take in ony sensible person." . . . Even Miss Laminda, with her larger knowledge of the world, was inclined to think American distances overdrawn.

There was just time to give general directions for a swept and garnished house and tidy children, and Daphne caught the only train to town that would take her to Euston for Crystal's arrival. As she saw the tall figure in the rough white coat and heavy furs coming toward her, she thought that

even the fatigues of a wintry Atlantic crossing had not affected her friend's serene beauty.

The strained look had gone from her eyes, and when the two were in the taxi on their way to Paddington Station, and all the first questions had been answered, Daphne commented on this.

"My dear," Crystal smiled back at her, "I've come to a conclusion not flattering to our sex. Any woman looks haggard who isn't loved. Any woman loses that haggard look when she thinks she is!"

"And . . . ?" Daphne prompted her.

"And . . . I've failed to get the divorce."

"I'm trying to piece together the two statements," Daphne said, when they had transferred to the Oxford train.

"Don't take either literally," Crystal replied. "As to the second, I had everything in order. Horace's desertion was easy to prove, as he had not been in America for two years until this last time. But I had to go out to Nevada, and establish a six months' residence there. In New York divorce would not have been possible on my terms, desertion.

"So I put everything in train out there in Reno. And my dear, who should walk into my hotel, just three weeks ago, but . . ."

"Not Horace?"

"Horace. He had remained in New York after getting my note that I intended to divorce him . . . and had followed me out to Nevada as soon as he discovered that I planned to arrange it out there. It seems I grew more valuable when there was danger of losing me."

"Beast!" said the would-be nun.

"No," Crystal almost laughed. "Only Horace. And, don't think me too weak . . . I nearly gave in. Of course I had no longer grounds for divorce, as he had returned. And Daphne—he is very attractive."

"As a Catholic, I should applaud your going back to him. As myself, knowing now what real love is, I should revolt in every instinct if you did."

"I didn't," Crystal said, a little wearily, as though she recalled a struggle. "The wound to my pride had been too deep. But I agreed . . . as of course I was forced to do . . . to let the divorce proceedings go by default. I asked him not to see me again, nor to write to me. And he left for New York and Buenos Aires immediately."

"Did you tell him about Captain Boyovich?"

"No. I knew poor Horace too well. The fact that another man had cared for me would have relighted his own flame."

"When I remember how fine and steadfast I thought him!" The colour mounted in Daphne's cheeks.

"And I did not tell him of Stefan," went on Crystal. "He said (of course there was nothing he wouldn't say to get me back when he found he couldn't) he said his infatuation for you was madness, and was quite over. Nevertheless, if I had told him Stefan loved you, the 'infatuation,' as he called it, would have returned. It seems so easy to read Horace now. I marvel at those years in which I was blind."

"And it's just that has brought back your beauty, Crystal? Not that you'd lost it, but it was under a cloud."

"Partly that . . . if what I had *has* come back! partly the memory of Boyovich,—partly a clever doctor I saw in New York who says my heart is practically sound again, and that there's no anæmia. But frankly, it's mostly Horace. I don't want him. Yet I'm shamefully pleased that he wanted me. It re-establishes my self-respect, I suppose."

Daphne looked out at the ploughed fields, where a light snow had fallen. Could self-respect ever bring back the light to her own eyes if she lost Stefan's love?

Crystal had asked her, in the first pause after they left Euston, what she had learned of Stefan's whereabouts, and now went back to this.

"Has Katty tried for news of the boy through the Foreign Office?"

"Oh, yes. And Mr. Norton and Mr. Dyfed have tried, for Katty, of course . . . they don't know about me! But I am certain he is alive. . . . Prisoner, perhaps, or wounded. But I shall hear."

And almost immediately after her faith was justified. A telegram came from Paris. Paris! Next door, nearly. "Lieutenant Stefan Dakovich seriously wounded. Arduous journey via Scutari, Medua, Brindisi. Now convalescing here. Unable write yet."

So Paris was still caring for wounded Serbian officers! What was there that France, with her own

myriads to nurse back to life, had not tried to do for Serbia?

Meanwhile Crystal's return released Daphne from her duties, and the girl could write unending and happy letters to her hero. Spring came ahead of her time in a lovely rush of bloom and soft air—and Daphne saw every budding fruit tree, every shadow on the blue Chilterns, with Stefan's eyes. She almost prayed that he would come in primrose time. If there is one season lovelier than another in Oxfordshire, she thought, it is when those pale gold flowers blossom suddenly, in garden beds and walks, in the woods, the very epitome of an unvexed spring.

Crystal went about with the old serenity. "She nearly had the pugnacious anæmia," Bedelia confided to Ri-Ri. "So it would have been awful, and never any sliding off the roof or pleasant things like that for us." Ri-Ri was being fitted for Haileybury School by a special tutor . . . a disabled young officer, an old Haileybury boy himself. Miss Tuckett taught only Bedelia, Bobby and Chou-Chou. Crystal was glad to clear decks, so to speak. She had invited Stefan to finish his convalescence at the Pond House, where she and Daphne could care for him. Katty had disposed of all formalities—leave from the Serbian government, from the boy's own Chief, and the rest of it.

So it was an early morning in March that Daphne stood on the platform at Victoria station, expecting Stefan's arrival.

The train drew in at last.

Daphne waited by the engine, looking down the long line of cars. Many figures in khaki stepped or leapt or were helped from the various exits, but none tall enough, Daphne said proudly to herself, for her Stefan. When the train had practically emptied, about mid-way down its length appeared the tall figure she sought. Stepping very slowly to the platform, the head high, looking eagerly over the crowd, the intense black of the bit of collar his open great coat allowed to show, distinguishing the Serbian from the English uniform, came this being "out of romance," as Crystal had called him.

It seemed to Daphne, moving quickly toward him, that the look in his eyes, as he suddenly found her, paid for all the harrowing delay and anxiety of those long weeks.

Katty had urged the invalid's remaining a few days at Cadogan Square. This fitted in well with Stefan's instructions from Belgrade. He had been entrusted, as knowing English conditions, above all the English language, with more than one special mission. He hoped to discharge these at once, and then enjoy the absolute quiet of the Pond House.

"It is very wonderful, Majka," he said, that night, as he entered the dining room with Lady Freke and Daphne, tall and straight for all his lameness, one arm still in a sling, very pale, but resolute . . . the Kossovo medal "for bravery in action" on his breast. "Wonderful to be here, in a home like this, with a real mother and a beloved. Perhaps I am the only one of a thousand Serbian officers who

can say today, after everything, 'I am happy!' "

It was easy to believe, if you saw only the luminous eyes he turned from one woman to the other, thought Katty. But if you surprised him in moments of silence when he did not feel himself under tender observation, you saw a bitterness in his sombre glance. Not physical suffering, although some deep lines had been drawn in the young face (one of his wounds had been very serious, a bullet clean through the lung, just over the heart—and there were three others from shrapnel, in ankle, knee and left arm)—but the mental agony of disillusion.

They made him go early to bed, although he had spent the day, after arriving, on the couch in the drawing room, Daphne's hand in his . . . and Katty said something of this bitterness as she and Daphne sat over the fire alone.

"He doesn't mean to talk of that side of it," the girl answered, "till he's stronger. He can speak of the war—of the butchery, that sickening retreat through the Albanian mountains—it's already epic in that country of epics . . . past and glorious history . . . but the failure of the other countries to see Serbia through . . . during the war and since . . . that's what eats his heart out. . . . Some of it's already years old . . . but the Serb memory is long, I fear."

Katty recalled Peter Norton's white face when he said, "I can't sleep o' nights for thinking of Serbia." And dear Francis Morrill—had he not

feared that his great country would incur the "undying resentment" of that little country?

"No, don't let him remember more than he must," Katty said aloud. "But I don't need to tell you how to take care of him."

"No woman need be told that," Daphne inclined to think. But she added, with a little grin at herself, by the time she had piloted him to the Pond House, that anyone who didn't know would soon learn in this young man's case. "So as a king!" Vrouw van Waaldorp had described him; and "so as a king," indeed, he expected, and received, unending service.

"For a gentleman who says he is a peasant," Daphne chaffed him, "you do an excellent imitation of a prince . . . a pampered prince."

"You will tell me where I fail, beloved," he answered.

"I don't imagine I shall," the girl replied seriously. "You would not be you if you changed."

They were resting in the old Icknield Way, whither Mo Garlick had pushed the young officer in a wheeled chair.

The lovers, Stefan leaning back comfortably in his chair, and Daphne sitting on the foot rest, were looking over the Oxfordshire fields. Crystal, who had come across from the Pond House to call Mo, stood a moment smiling down on the delightful pair.

"It is not so easy for a Serb to change as for an American," Daphne went on. "I shall do all the changing!"

As Crystal turned to go, Stefan appealed to her,

"Must she not tell me where I fail? If she will not, will you?"

"You mean, perhaps," she responded, "that you would like to have us tell you when you are not like an American boy?"

"No," said Stefan concisely.

"No?" Crystal was a little incredulous. "You really mean you do not wish to resemble even the best type of the American boy?"

"No, I do not," Stefan declared gravely.

"She means Merton," Daphne laughed. "And she can't understand any boy's not wishing to be Mertonised."

"Even so," Stefan smiled, but insisted, "even so I remain Serb."

"For punishment I shall tell you what Merton wrote his mother when she expressed enthusiasm (unduly, Merton may have thought)," Daphne said wickedly, "about you and some others. 'Remember, Mater, your Serb may be noble, but he is *not* Western.'" She drew his hand against her cheek to take out the sting.

"He is right," Stefan agreed. "But," he paused here, "there is such a thing as being too Western."

"Bravo, Stefan!" Crystal applauded, "the honours are with you."

"But Crystal's heart is with Merton," gibed Daphne.

Spring was a whole month ahead.

The Primrose Time Daphne had wished for was certainly at her lover's feet. Those March morn-

ings and afternoons were something out of a dream —shimmering, lovely; wild violets and plum blossoms; and everywhere the pale primroses. Stefan, growing steadily stronger, had still something of the child's dependence on Daphne and Crystal, and protested like a child if he were left alone ten minutes.

All Sallum Prior participated in his recovery. The village children brought flowers for the "Sir Began" officer—Miss Laminda sent Mary Meteyard with her black currant cordial, "very strenthenin' to the lungs." The old men of the village sauntered by his wheel chair whenever he was seen in the lane, pausing to ask the inevitable, "Be ye a'coomin' along, Sir?" Bedelia and the small Belgians maintained a circus of performing animals for him, in which Finn McCoul and Alicia Mooney were everything from trained elephants to Lloyd George and de Valera; while Bobby and Mr. Honey drew the chair, unsuspecting the aid of Daphne, guiding it from the back.

On one of their walks they reached the home of Mr. Honey himself, one of three little houses under a single thatched roof. And Bobby, still warm with the joy of his own recent experience, a meal with his Weelum Jawge, now suggested that what was needed for "our very own wounded officer" was similar entertainment.

"But I am not invited to dine with your friend, Madame Honey," Stefan replied perplexedly.

"I can ask her just like nuffin to bevite you!" Bobby assured him. "And vey has ve nicest fings

to eat at Mrs. Honey's. Doesn't you, Weelum Jawge?"

Mr. Honey said "Yeh" doubtfully.

"Oh!" Bobby gave himself up to retrospect. . . . "On Sundays vey have a grand *fantastic* dinner! meat every Sunday! and sprouts and ve pudding. And on Monday vere's some of ve meat left over, and Mrs. Honey warms it up, and potatoes. Oh, always potatoes! and a pudding . . . ve kind Mrs. Honey makes . . . *much* nicer van ours . . . different . . . and" (a long sigh of bliss) "vey puts on vere hats and goes out!"

"Suppose," Daphne advised, "as it might worry Mrs. Honey to have such a badly wounded officer there, you ask for some of her flowers instead."

They were looking over the low hedge into Mrs. Honey's cheerful patch of spring flowers and spring vegetables.

"Goody! goody!" shouted Bobby. "I'll ask her will she give him some "Wood-lice-bleeding," and he was off up the path.

"English names are sometimes curious," commented Stefan, politely. "Wood-lice-bleeding?"

And Daphne, who had hidden a convulsed face behind the chair till Bobby was out of hearing, gasped, "No. It's 'Love-lies-bleeding.' And not in bloom for months yet!"

As Bobby returned with flowers enough to fill the chair, Stefan walked home, leaning on the back, with the small boys pulling it, while Daphne rested one hand on the chair, partly to guide it, partly to feel she was helping Stefan.

"A very Car of Spring, drawn by Cupids, and attended by Angels!" Lady Freke hailed the procession, meeting them in the green lane between blooming hedges. She had arrived unexpectedly, and had walked over *Bittums* to find the invalid and his convoy.

"You have news for me," Stefan said at once. He was very pale after his hour's walk, and Daphne made him rest again in the chair while he talked. The little boys scampered off, and Lady Freke and Daphne stood beside him.

"How did you know, my boy?" questioned Katty.

"I dreamed last night I saw my men riding in the shadow of the Sokol Mountain," he said. "That means I must go back to my regiment."

"Are you strong enough?" asked Katty, handing him the telegram she had brought.

"No," Daphne answered for him, but she added wistfully, "he will go, just the same."

CHAPTER XXVII

DEATH AND HAZLEBY AND ALICIA

"'Different languages—but the same prayer. Different prayers, but the same God.' So we say in our country, Majka, and if sorrow comes to you, you will remember that, un-Western as your son says I am, I can pray when you are praying, even in a different language, and the same God hears us both. I kiss your hand.

"Your adopted son,

"STEFAN."

Katty handed this letter, when she had read it, to her friend, Francis Morrill. He had been having tea with her, and now leaned back in his chair, smoking, and studying his companion's face. She was leaning on the little tea table, whence Grimmer had removed the tray, looking through the long windows at the golden sky over the new green of the Square.

In her face, Morrill thought, despite her years (he knew she was older than himself), astonishing gaiety and freedom from wrinkles. Yet perhaps the Past had dealt her harder blows than anyone knew. And the Future . . . ? No mother of a soldier son could say even now that Death would not knock at her door.

Death had knocked at his own . . . but kindly, taking away with him an intolerable burden. But whereas he could not mourn his wife, he knew, from chance speeches of Lady Freke's and from Mrs. McClinton, that, droll as it seemed, Katty had mourned all her three husbands. They had been not only tolerated, but deeply loved.

And Katty was fond of saying: "No woman is both wife and mother. And I'm a born wife."

Sir Francis sighed, thinking a "born wife" must be an agreeable asset.

Yet Katty's sons would have done the most devoted mother credit. And her so-called adopted son, the young Serbian, plainly found in her the tenderest mothering. Was it true that a woman couldn't be wife and mother with equal success?

Thinking of Dakovich, he re-read his letter. "Is this all?" he asked.

"Yes . . . don't you see? 'Tis his way of telling me he knows something is going to happen."

"Something is going to happen to all of us," said Morrill a little impatiently.

"No, Francis. These mountain people think they can foresee death. You know how your own Highlanders claim a second sight. He thinks I'm going to lose one of my boys."

"You're foolish, Katty, now, with the war an old story. . . . But tell me, what's the latest bulletin?"

"They've reached Vladivostock, my boys. But letters take a long time."

"Where's Hazleby's lady love?"

"Alicia is still near Fiume. She refused to come home after her shell shock."

"How could Norton let her go after the older girl's death?" Morrill wondered.

"Can you, can anyone, stop youth?" Katty flashed at him.

"And your sister and Miss O'Brien, what are their plans?" her visitor continued.

"You're a dear, trying to distract me from my anxiety. Crystal has wonderful plans . . . she thinks that she will take in a dozen children or young people each year from abroad—Belgian, French, Italian, Serbian—pay all their expenses for three months and give them a good time and a chance to learn English—a Rhodes Scholarship on a tiny scale . . ."

"Stunning!" Francis Morrill applauded this. "And eminently practical. One step toward solving the international problem."

Katty's answer was interrupted by Grimmer, who came in with a grave face.

"Mrs. Norton on the telephone, my lady," he said.

Katty looked at him a moment, and then went out quietly. As Grimmer held the door open for her, Morrill nodded to him almost imperceptibly to remain. When they could hear Lady Freke telephoning, he asked, "Is something wrong, Grimmer?"

"I fear so, sir. Mrs. Norton sounded very strained, sir."

"Thank you," Sir Francis said as the giant butler

withdrew. He walked uneasily up and down the room. If the young Serbian's words were to be verified! If Merton or Hazleby were killed! But a glance at Katty's face when she returned told him that the worst, at any rate, had not happened.

"Thank you for waiting, Francis," she said gently. "I know how natural is a man's desire to escape a scene. Alicia has been killed."

After a long pause, Morrill said: "I am indeed sorry. Of all we feared, that, some way, seemed the least likely. . . . How was it?"

"A collision at night," Katty answered. "Her ambulance overturned. The child was dead when they picked her up. Poor, poor little girl! and my poor Hazleby!"

"How did Mrs. Norton seem?" Morril enquired.

"Aileen is always surprising," Katty answered. "Think of the courage it took to telephone herself! I said, 'What is it? This is Lady Freke.' And she answered in person. 'Yes, Katty. You will have no daughter-in-law from this house.' Then she told me the bare facts . . . quite calmly . . . and asked if I would write Hazleby. Telegrams are not reliable out there."

She walked to the window.

"Suppose I write Merton for you," said her friend, knowing how she hated to write letters at any time, "then he must tell his brother . . . poor Merton!"

"Yes. And telegraph any way. Sometimes a wire goes through in spite of restrictions. And I must telegraph Crystal."

"May I come back for you and drive you over to the Nortons'?" he suggested.

"Yes, thank you. After dinner?" He took her hand without saying anything. "You know Merton's address?" she asked. He nodded, pressed her hand and went out.

" 'Yes, but there's a decency to be observed! quoth she!' " Katty quoted to herself. . . . "These English observe the great decencies of living and dying, with no fuss for either. I've never before been able to stand anyone near me when I was in sorrow . . . but I really liked Francis Morrill's being here!"

She found the Nortons astonishingly quiet.

"I had no son to give," Peter said. "I have given my daughters."

And Aileen, walking with Katty in the moonlight up and down that long back garden, spoke tranquilly.

"Write Hazleby that he must give her as freely as I do. . . . He will love some other girl when this is all over, but I shall have no other daughter. Yet tell him, if I had six, I would give every one for England."

"He will not love any other girl," Katty said. "My boys are not like me. I must love, to go on living. They are like their father, who loved only once. Alicia will never die in Hazleby's heart."

"Then write him that when he comes home, he and I will look for her grave together. And tell him Peter and I will love him in Alicia's place."

Katty could not answer.

The round moon looked down at them in that London garden, over many roofs and tall trees. In the centre of the grass plot a little fountain tinkled. Their silken skirts rustled one against the other as they walked side by side.

Through the study window, where no one had remembered to draw the blinds, they could see the green globe of the reading lamp, and Peter's fine intent profile in the green light.

"Writing, writing! The paper must go on if all the daughters in the world are dead!" said Aileen, without bitterness.

"A special article?" Katty asked.

"Tomorrow's leader. It was to have been 'On a new Humanity to our old Enemies.'"

Morrill, who had left her there at nine, called for her at ten. The maid said only: "Car for Lady Freke," so Katty imagined he had sent his man, and did not hurry. But half an hour later she found Morrill himself waiting on the pavement for her.

"But this was your evening to speak before the Colonials!" she suddenly remembered, as they entered the car.

"I called that off," was all he said.

"What goodness is left in the world!" She thought she was recalling Peter's and Aileen's simple heroism, but Francis Morrill's sacrifice of a great opportunity to enforce his views upon a distinguished audience seemed to her one of the most generous things she had ever encountered.

She told him all she had learned. It appeared

that there had been an emergency call, on those savage hills above Cattaro. Alicia's the only ambulance, a clouded night, impossible roads . . . the need for great haste . . . a crash. Was her nerve shaken after that old shell shock? Her parents thought this likely . . . but thanked God she was going, and the ambulance empty . . . not returning with it full.

"Not many daughters have the chance to die gloriously like that!" Peter had said proudly. "Sons, yes."

Katty, remembering this, thought of her sons, and was silent. And Morrill, who had neither sons nor daughters, was silent also.

When they reached Cadogan Square, he sent his chauffeur home, as he wished to walk. Before Katty mounted her steps, he said, "If there should be need of anyone, or anything, will you call upon me? Now, or whenever the need arises?"

"You're thinking of Stefan's letter," Katty answered. "So am I. I haven't second sight like the boy, but every-day reasoning makes it likely the need may arise."

"You will remember?"

"Yes, Francis. I won't thank you, but I am grateful."

Crystal came to town next morning. It was always Crystal who must write the family letters, and this time of tragedy was no exception. When Katty had told her all she could, she wrote this to the boys, and then went to the Nortons'. From there she

wrote again, and without telling Katty, telegraphed also.

The briefest answer came . . . from Merton . . . but long after:

"Thank you, dearest Tante Crystal, in Hazleby's name. He is desperately eager to run every risk, and there are only too many chances. I am with him whenever it is possible, so I can't write. Our love to you, to little Mater, to the Nortons and Daphne.

"MERTON."

They expected no answer, but the silence was hard to bear. Crystal had gone back to the Pond House. Katty filled every moment with her work for the Flemings, and with a new venture on a Serbian Relief Committee.

She walked, when she could find time, in the Kensington Gardens, or Hyde Park, and here Allen Pearce found her one day, alone, by the Serpentine sauntering slowly, but turning every now and then.

To his surprised questioning she answered: "I am doing a sort of mental review of my blessings! Here am I, Irish American, in the heart of the capital of England . . . to the north of me the wonderful Nortons; to the west Meredith Dyfed; to the east, in Berkeley Square, dear Francis Morrill; to the southeast Horace Dimock's hotel, if not Horace; to the south my own Cadogan Square . . . to the southwest, what?"

"Only most of your friends, and a modest landscape painter," chuckled Allen Pearce. "How neatly America squares the London circle!"

"London *is* wonderful, Allen. The centre of the world. But don't tell New York."

"But isn't New York the centre now?" rumbled Allen Pearce.

"In money, yes. Not in tradition," Lady Freke comforted him.

"I shall go to America as soon as I'm free here. I suppose half of Europe will also," said the painter in his happy bass.

Katty left him reluctantly. "One clings to every moment in which there's no grief," she thought, walking rapidly toward Cadogan Square.

A boy was at the door with a telegram. Seeing that it was for her, she went in without knocking, but stood a moment in the open doorway, gazing at the sunset sky, and at the new green of the spring trees.

The servants had not heard her come in. Pietro, the Dalmatian cook, was probably getting dinner; Grimmer reading his evening paper in the servant's hall and expounding his views to Lady Freke's own maid.

Katty heard herself saying "Hazleby! Hazleby!" as she opened the telegram and saw the word "Vladivostock" at the head. . . .

"Darling Mater," Merton had telegraphed, "Hazleby gone, splendidly. Engine wrong. Love, Merton."

There was a letter to come later: "You can be proud of him. He fell, terribly injured. But he lived long enough for me to reach him. His face was not hurt, and he said, 'My love to the Mater, old Merton. Damn good luck for me to go this way! So long,

dear old boy.' And it was over. He had a smile. You know Hazleby's smile, Mater. You see we had Tante Crystal's telegram that Alicia had gone just a week before.

"Your doubly affectionate Merton."

This was to come weeks afterward, but almost the mother read it now between the lines of the telegram. Hazleby!

She looked again across the Square to the western sky, grown perceptibly darker.

"Hazleby!" she said.

Then she put the telegram back into the envelope and closed the door.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RE-ADJUSTMENT

"The Great War made Life of no consequence. And now Time itself is as unimportant as Death," wrote Crystal to Katty. "Is it three weeks since Hazleby left us . . . can we say, like Mallarmé, 'for another star'? Only a star, someway, seems the fitting place for Hazleby, as some mountain Valhalla for Stefan. No, we have had no news of the beautiful boy, and of course you haven't, or you would have telegraphed. Dead or a prisoner? and if a prisoner in Bolshevist hands, perhaps worse than dead.

"Daphne is wonderful, sustained by a confidence in human love marvellous in what Merton calls a 'near-nun.' Merton writes to me every week, as you know, and I send him, as always, long letters in return. I feel 'tis wrong to write him so much of Daphne, whose heart is full of Stefan, alive or dead. But when could I refuse Merton anything? From the moment you left him with me, ten months old, the most engaging baby! when you and his father spent that year abroad."

THUS Crystal to her sister, who had gone out to the Riviera a few days after the news of Hazleby's death. She had been asked, almost the day following, to take charge of a convalescent home out there for officers. Peter Norton had told Crystal

in confidence that Francis Morrill had engineered this. It was exactly the thing for Katty . . . no nursing, at which she was very bad, but presiding over this enormous villa which she soon turned into Cadogan Square on a huge scale. Even Grimmer arrived to help. There were scores of officers coming and going, derelicts of the great war, "finding it more like home than their own homes, I'll warrant!" Peter Norton said.

Merton was to join her there when he returned from Vladivostock. And meanwhile she was a little nearer news of Stefan. Alas! Stefan's letter to her before Hazleby's death was the last word to come from him. Katty's friends had made every effort to get information . . . the Serbian Government reported that Lieutenant Dakovich had been sent on a mission of great importance, and that unfortunately he had not returned, nor had any news been received of his whereabouts. From private sources Sir Francis Morrill learned that the boy had been sent to Odessa, probably farther, and there were rumours that he, and his companions, had been murdered. This last he now told Crystal only, and she agreed that neither Katty nor Daphne should be told till there was further confirmation.

Meanwhile Crystal had another letter from Horace. She said nothing of it to Daphne till the children were abed, and the house was still. Daphne was knitting by the fire.

"I have heard from Horace," began Crystal,

turning from her desk where she had been re-reading the extraordinary missive.

Daphne looked up in some alarm.

"No, my child," Crystal smiled a little. "It hasn't upset me. Indeed, I wonder that his handwriting, which has meant so much to me, hardly raises a flutter. Yet I'm still fond of Horace. My indignation is a thing of the past. I understand him, that's all. 'Tout comprendre . . . c'est tout pardonner,' I suppose."

"What says Ananias?" Daphne enquired.

"This time he *asks* me to divorce him . . . not for himself, not for me, not for you, my dear! but for a good, kind soul whom otherwise he has greatly wronged."

"Crocodile!" said Miss O'Brien.

"The good, kind soul was his typewriter; she is now his housekeeper. I gather that she's pretty, and old enough to know her way about. But evidently she makes him very comfortable. And probably will leave him if he doesn't regularise the position."

"Smutty story!" Daphne put in.

"I must do him the justice to say he offers to abandon Miss Good Kind Soul if I'll go back to him'"

Crystal looked from the letter to her companion's face, now a white flame of indignation.

"I'm only surprised that he doesn't try to whistle us both back! Crystal! how can you be so calm? Honestly, if that man were within reach, and I had a gun, I'd shoot him on sight!"

"And you were once a holy nun!"

Daphne laughed a little in spite of herself. "Not quite! . . . But you'll ignore his letter, won't you?"

"I don't know," Crystal returned. "He wishes to spare me a second long trip out to Nevada . . . and says he can send me sufficient proof of his conjugal infidelity . . . I believe that's the expression . . . to enable me to secure the divorce on statutory grounds in New York. But I can't touch that sort of pitch. I can't defile myself, or the man I once loved. No, I'll go back to Nevada, and get the divorce on the grounds of desertion. It's quite the most decent."

"When shall you go?"

"Almost at once," Crystal answered. She was free for the first time in many months. Aileen Norton was taking on the Hostel, Ri-Ri was at Haileybury, Chou-Chou was to return to his family.

"I shall go with you," Daphne announced.

"Oh, my dear! Will you? That would indeed be a comfort."

So they closed the Pond House, and sailed for New York. On the way over Crystal wrote Katty, at last! a brief account of her ill-starred marriage. She could do this now without bitterness. Indeed, she lamented a little her own tameness.

"Only nothing has mattered," she wrote, "since I saw the first refugees! I've attained to, not Nirvana, but what is perhaps as soothing . . . a sense of proportion. I was a sheep then. Horace was a wolf.

For a while we changed, mentally anyway. I am now not the one or the other; nor perhaps is Horace.

"Daphne quotes a Serbian proverb she had from Stefan, 'When wolves and sheep are brothers, what will the wolves eat?' But Horace will always find something to eat."

And so the second journey to Nevada. But they went by the southern route and waited in San Francisco, for a letter intercepted them there from Merton:

"Dear Daffy-down-Dilly: Do you remember those one-sided men we used to draw as kids, with one arm and one leg? Well, I'm one now . . . one arm, I mean; both legs remain to me. . . . 'Thank God!' says you, ''tis no worse!' 'Thank the Devil, or the Bolsheviki, *même chose!*' says I . . . ''tis no better.' Pretty low down to throw a last stone at a dog making for his kennel in the little old U. S. Only Yankee Doodle knows how soon I'll get there now! Write me lots of letters. "MERTON."

Crystal looked with tear-filled eyes at Daphne. Merton, her big, splendid, deft, clever Merton! Maimed for life. "Yet I'm glad, glad," she cried out. "It's as the boy says, 'Thank God 'tis no worse.' But oh . . . Daphne!"

"I know what you're thinking, Crystal. Don't think it. Even if Stefan never comes back, there can be no one else. I'd sacrifice anything in the world for Merton . . . always, except my love for Stefan."

"Yes, child, and I would take nothing away from Stefan. Yet I'd give everything to Merton. Merton with one arm, but plucky! One knows how plucky he'll be."

Almost on top of this came a "wireless" from mid-ocean saying Merton had sailed from Vladivostock, and would follow his letter in a few days. They therefore decided to postpone the Nevada trip till his arrival, and to await him in San Francisco.

This extraordinary town was familiar to Crystal, who had spent a winter during the war in California, but it was new to Daphne.

"I see what Stefan means by the 'spirit of a place,'" she said. "He thinks a town or a house or even a bit of meadow has a soul, as a person has, and that you feel it as soon as you enter there. The spirit of San Francisco actually met us at the Ferry landing."

"And it's a friendly spirit," Crystal agreed.

"Friendly! It's a dancing, keen, capable, spirit" —the girl developed her theme. "Anything may happen here, any vision come true."

"The nicest thing is going to happen here," Crystal reminded her. "Merton's coming."

That wasn't the nicest, but it was very nice, Daphne thought. And when her cousin did arrive, she realised afresh that if he were not her cousin, and if Stefan had never come into her life, Merton would certainly have charmed her tenderest feelings. She and Crystal, with Bobby and Bedelia, met him at the dock when the big transport came slowly in—the tall good looking cousin in his

American uniform, but with, alas! the empty sleeve. He had declined to wear the artificial arm upon arriving.

"I wanted you to see me as I am, hand made," he put it lightly, but meant it seriously—honest Merton! "I'll put on the machine product when we dress for dinner."

"It will be useful for wearing Obadiah on," said Bedelia, speaking for the first time. The children had been a little shy with their big cousin.

"Obadiah! You don't mean to say my old friend Obadiah is still going strong?" Merton asked in the most flattering way.

"Yes . . . here he is!" and Bedelia produced the gentleman in question from her shoulder, where he had been hidden by her curls. "I suppose you will want to take him away now?" She said this bravely.

"Not at all," answered Merton hastily. "I couldn't give him the care he is used to, and he must be pretty old for a white rat, isn't he?"

"He's Anniebiluvium!" Bobby interposed.

"He means antediluvian," corrected Bobby's older sister. "But he's really antebellum." Bedelia now knew a little Latin, as one may at ten. "I'm glad you can't take him, because you wouldn't understand his declining years. They have to be soothed, you see. Especially after so much travelling."

"Tomorrow is Decoration Day," said Crystal. "You can't report till after that? and we'll show you this wonderful San Francisco."

His aunt and cousins were radiantly proud of him. "I feel like kissing every doughboy who salutes you!" laughed Daphne.

The cousins had a long talk that evening.

"No news of Dakovich?" Merton asked.

"None."

"I'll be mighty glad for him if he comes through all right, you believe that, Daffy? But you can't expect me to be glad for myself."

"If he comes through, or if he never comes through," Daphne said, "there can never be any one for me but Stefan. You understand that, Merton dear?"

"Yes. It's in the family. There was only Alicia for Hazleby; only Stefan for you, only you for me. My father was like that. And Mater says your mother was, Aunt Leonora. . . ."

"No, she didn't care much for my father," Daphne disagreed.

"It wasn't your father; did you never know? It was Dimock."

"Dimock . . . Do you mean Horace?"

"Horace Dimock . . . the bounder who's treated Tante Crystal like the hound he is."

"Horace was in love with my mother? And with Tante Crystal . . . and O Merton? It oughn't to strike my funnybone, but it does. He was in love with me!"

"Of all the infernal impudence!"

"Poor Uncle Horace!" Daphne laughed uncontrollably.

"Poor nothing! I'll bash his head in when I see him! poor Uncle Horace!"

"Why is it funny when elderly people are in love?" the girl asked when she could speak.

"It isn't. It's disgraceful," the boy answered.

"No, it's tragic. My poor little mother! That's why she left him my guardian, I suppose. But they weren't elderly then. She died at thirty. Merton! I'm nearly twenty-three myself. And Stefan is only twenty-two. Do you suppose he'll ever think of me as elderly?"

"Come to me if he does. I'm nearly twenty-four. You'll never be elderly to me, Daphne!"

The next day, coming out alone into the breezy May sunshine, Daphne saw a crowd in the street and remembered that there would be a parade and that some Czecho-Slovak wounded who had arrived from Siberia on the same transport with Merton were to be in the procession.

A kind little man, whom Merton had introduced to her the night before in the hotel lobby, paused to tell her about it.

"They'll come up Geary Street," he said. "Walk along this side of Union Square and you'll have a good view. The poor wounded chaps who are to be in the parade hoofed it clear across Siberia, from Kiev."

"And reached Vladivostock?" Daphne asked.

"Yes. Great business. There they come!"

American soldiers first and a lively band. The crowd cheered, all the men along the route lifting

their hats as the American flag swung by. Then the wounded foreign soldiers . . . most of them in cars. A few afoot . . . and midway, with a small group of officers, marched an unusually tall figure, in the same uniform, desperately shabby like the rest, walking as though he were indifferent to the excitement, and with a slight limp. . . . His head was turned the other way as he passed, and his kepi made him like the others, except for his height.

"So as a king!" came into Daphne's mind, as she watched him, for he was like Stefan in figure, and carried his head more proudly than the others.

Daphne edged closer to the front row of spectators. At that moment the tall officer turned his head.

It was Stefan.

The sun was in his eyes so that he could not see her, and although she called his name, without realising that she did so, the music, of course, prevented his hearing her. But she felt her arm seized at that moment. Merton, coming in search of her, had heard.

"Merton! Bless you for coming! It's Stefan . . . there, there! reach him, stop him!"

"In the parade?"

"Yes, there! that tall officer! He's alive! O Merton!"

Merton shaded his eyes and looked up the street. "That tall one in Czech uniform? You're sure, Daphne?"

"Sure, oh, sure! Hurry, Merton dear!"

They broke their way through the crowd, people giving way eagerly as soon as they saw the officer's

uniform and the girl's radiant face. The procession was swinging around the corner, and toward Market Street. By this time the cousins were abreast of him, and Daphne could study him with a full heart and brimming eyes. She could see only the line of his cheek, much thinner and sharper. He walked wearily, with a slight limp. The boy was obviously older, but the head always high.

"So as a king!" Daphne repeated between smiles and sobs. "Merton, you'll forgive me everything when you see him!"

"I've seen him," her cousin said grimly, but he added generously. "He's a fine fellow, Daffy. He must have been through a lot. He must have escaped from Kiev and crossed Russia. Holy smoke! he must have been on the transport with me!"

The procession halted as it drew near the main artery of traffic, Market Street, and Merton, bidding Daphne wait a moment, stepped quickly to Stefan's side. Stefan saluted the two bars on the American shoulder, casually, but at Merton's "Dakovich, old boy!" he recognised him. "Daphne's here!" Merton added, and Stefan went white under his tan. He looked to where Merton pointed. The eyes of the lovers met.

Two officers approached, and the older one said to Merton. "He finds friends!" And to Stefan in French, "Make your escape, old man! You'll find us at the same hotel!"

Stefan saluted him automatically, and automatically followed Merton. Reaching Daphne he had no

words, but bent over her hand as that first time in Rijsdijk. The people about were looking on sympathetically, and a nervous middle-aged man raised a cheer, taken up by some small boys and a few excited maiden ladies.

"You can see she's found him after all!" one of them said shrilly, and Daphne, who had clung to Stefan's arm as she pushed a way through the crowd, smiled up at him repeating, "After all! Stefan, after all!"

The boy had no eyes for anything but her face. Merton manœuvred them up Powell Street toward the hotel.

"Attention, Kindergarten!" he exclaimed finally, as a Geary Street car missed them by a few inches. "Come to! I'm not used to playing nursemaid!"

They both smiled at him foolishly.

"O Merton!" Daphne broke her rapturous silence at last. "I'm saying my prayers! God is good!"

"God is good," repeated Stefan. "*Comme je suis reconnaissant!* I have spoken no English for a long time," he said slowly. "Forgive me if I speak French or Serbian or not at all!"

"Forgive you! God forgive me for ever doubting His goodness!" breathed Daphne.

They were mounting the hotel steps. "Take him up to Tante Crystal, Daffy, and I'll get him a room next mine," Merton ordered.

A sudden realisation seemed to sweep over the young Montenegrin. He put out his hand impulsively. "You are the best man in the world," he

said, and the two shook hands silently. Daphne turned her head to hide the tears. "What can I do to prove my gratitude to God?" she asked herself.

They entered one of the elevators as Merton left them. Luckily it was empty; and the "boy" absorbed in his work. The lovers stood behind him, Stefan holding Daphne's hand to his lips, and murmuring to her in Serbian.

As they stepped out, they found Crystal and the children waiting to go down. Crystal's amazement was nothing to Bobby's vociferous welcome.

"It's our own officer. He isn't dead at all! he's not dead even a little! Mummie! Bedelia! he's came back!"

"Bobby darling!" Daphne hugged the small boy. "That's all I can say, too! *He's came back!*"

Stefan was kissing Crystal's hand and the proud Bedelia's, but he held firmly to Daphne with his left hand. They all helped conduct him to Crystal's apartment, Bedelia going ahead capably with the keys, Crystal and Daphne each holding a hand, and Bobby pushing him strongly from the back. In the sitting-room, with its fine windows looking east and south over the sunlit city roofs and on to the hills and the bay, they forced him into a great chair, his black head against the red velvet, making him into an old Italian portrait, Crystal thought. Bobby took his cap reverently, Crystal rang for coffee, and Bedelia let him hold Obadiah for a little while. Daphne sat on the arm of the chair.

"I am *chez moi!* It is home . . . my home,"

Stefan said glowingly. "My friends, my beloved!"

"And your Obadiah!" Bedelia affirmed, "if Merton will let you!"

"Where is Merton?" Crystal was heart-sick a moment for her boy.

"Getting a room for Stefan next his," Daphne answered. "But now tell us, Stefan, if you're a little rested, how it's happened. how you came to be with the Czecho-Slovaks."

"I was prisoner in Kiev," Stefan spoke slowly. "My government sent me to talk to the Bolsheviki, and they put me in prison. Very bad, no food, no fire. Then a girl helped us to escape, and we walked many days, in the snow. All the Russians very kind . . . they are good people, the Russians. Only now they are all mad, peasants, soldiers, officials, all mad. It is a sickness like another. But they love my country . . . and I had much help. Fighting, of course. I joined some Czech soldiers when my companion was killed . . . they gave me this uniform . . . and we stole a train from the Bolsheviki . . . and travelled a long way. . . . I was . . . what you call . . . fireman. I shovelled much wood and coal."

"You!" Daphne laughed at him even now.

"I! Now do I work like . . . like . . . your American boy!" he assured Crystal. "I have forgotten to talk, but I have learned to work!"

"O go on, go on!" this breathlessly, from Bobby.

"And then at last Vladiovostock . . . and the American ship . . . and a good rest . . . three weeks

I slept . . . yes, beloved! nearly always I slept! and then San Francisco."

He looked around at the little group.

"Always will San Francisco seem the most beautiful place in the world to me."

CHAPTER XXIX

EXIT MR. DIMOCK

Horace Dimock drove once more to that comfortable hotel overlooking Hyde Park, where even in the fullest season he could be sure of his delightful rooms.

He was returning, as so often before, from Buenos Aires. It was six months since his last arrival, a year since that other June day return. He recalled the Norton's dinner that night . . . his visit to the convent, and his later visit to declare his passion to Daphne.

Piquant, that! A passion for a holy nun! It had been an original moment. He did not often think of Daphne. now-a-days, but he often remembered his own sensations, when, at forty-six, he had found himelf capable of falling in love. Not many men could say that.

He had not been in love since. The little lady in Buenos Aires, whom he had, for a while, thought of marrying . . . she had been very set on it . . . he had soon tired of; she had made too many scenes. There had been no one else, unfortunately. Horace always prided himself on bringing real sentiment into his affairs. It was one of the things that kept him young.

If he regretted anything in his past, it was perhaps the severing of relations with Crystal. It would be almost worth while going back to her. Was she still as beautiful? That type wore well. She would always be the ideal housekeeper, thoroughly understanding how to make a man comfortable.

Still, one wanted more than that. One wanted intellectual companionship. Crystal was intelligent, her letters extraordinary. He had certainly missed her letters, but she was herself a bit dull at times. She never "sparkled" as Katty did.

He must look up Katty Freke . . . if only to see what she was like as a widow the third time. By Jove! she would carry it off! Absurd as it was to bury three husbands, she'd probably carry it off amazingly. He had not cared much for Katty in the old days. . . . Very likely, he said handsomely to himself, it was his own immaturity that kept him from appreciating her. The normal man, of course, admired a lovely face, a gentle manner . . . and, above all, deference to his opinions. Katty Freke had never, in her life, shown any human being a moment's deference . . . unless, perhaps, the late Chief of the Irish Party . . . but after all, that made for interest in conversation. And she had an astounding facility in acquiring clever and influential friends. She must have been a very useful wife to poor Blundell Freke.

He was arriving in the afternoon this time. . . . Town looked much as usual. The crowds of men in khaki had gone. The streets were full and gay . . . London nearly normal again.

Coming to his hotel, he telephoned Cadogan Square. Good old Grimmer answered, "No, her ladyship was not in; she would be dining at home, however, quite alone. Very few dinners these days, sir. We have only returned this fortnight from the Riviera . . . very fine work we have done out there, sir. But her ladyship needed a holiday, especially in the hot weather. After nearly six years without a day's rest, as you might say, sir."

Horace had heard in a Buenos Aires paper of Lady Freke's Convalescent Home. Kind of Katty, that, when interest in war work had naturally lapsed for most people.

"Suppose he, Grimmer, telephone to Mr. Dimock shortly? He knew her ladyship would appreciate Mr. Dimock's company to dinner."

In half an hour Katty telephoned herself. He must, of course, come to dinner, or what passed for that long lost meal. At seven thirty? They'd have a good chance to talk before Meredith Dyfed looked in at ten.

Horace presented himself with agreeable anticipations at the familiar door. Once more there were flower-filled window boxes in the Square, and few houses needed paint. At Lady Freke's the brass of knocker and doorknobs shone resplendently as ever, and Grimmer's benignity was almost pontifical as he opened to the returning friend of the family.

Upstairs the long windows were swung back to

the sunset and the jewel-like blue drawing-room was filled with Katty's blush roses.

Katty herself, coming in a moment later, was in pearly grey, with a wide black belt like a girl's and a black band around the foolish white hair. If her manner lacked the warmth of their last interview, a year earlier, it was nevertheless charming, but he realised that whereas she had openly found him handsome in his last visit, his grey hair and increased bulk were a surprise to her.

"I must thank you," she said, hurriedly for Katty. "You wrote me very kind letters on two occasions." (Horace knew she meant at the time of Sir Blundell's death, and of Hazleby's.) "You weren't surprised that I never answered."

"No; and of course I received your formal card of thanks, both times."

She had walked with him to the window.

"The world has used you very well, my dear girl, even the wicked world of the past few years."

"Who else would call me his dear girl? I was 47 in April."

"And I in May," Dimock admitted, as they went in to dinner.

"No footman, you see," his hostess said. "Grimmer does everything in the house," she smiled at the big butler, "except my hair and the cooking."

"O my lady!" deprecated the large one.

"Well, nearly everything. But tell me your plans now, or better still, your ideas."

"My ideas must focus on one thing," Horace replied genially. "Your astonishing self. I feel now,

seeing you like this, in this delicious house, that it's all I came for."

"You've not outgrown the habit of pretty speeches, Horace," Lady Freke encouraged him.

"I've outgrown many other things, however." He was longing to say Daphne, or even Crystal, but Grimmer's presence prevented. "What, on your side, have you outgrown; Irish politics?"

"Ah, that's a black, black door. I'll not go that way. Since the Sinn Fein business, I've turned my eyes from Irish-English relations."

"From Ireland, too?" Horace was rather pleased.

"Never from Ireland. Never from England. Apart, they are the finest things in this world. Together, ugh! impossible. Ireland, that should be all beauty, wit and pathos, the poetry of this life, is, for the moment anyway, a spiteful child. England, that has been so sane and sound in all other relations, has paranoia when it comes to Ireland . . . absolute failure of the brain to act normally." She paused a moment . . . then went on with an effort. "And when, between them, they murdered John Redmond . . . for it was nothing else . . . I felt, as I said . . . a black door had closed for me. I can never go back."

Horace was touched more than he would have thought possible by anything relating to the Irish Question.

"Our own country must have given you a brighter outlook," he said gently.

Katty beamed. "We did it well, Horace. . . . As Merton says, we delivered the goods. I'm not

wearing shamrocks this summer, but I'm certainly cultivating a little bald-headed eagle."

"But he won't play about with your little British lion, will he?" Horace tried to enter into the spirit of this.

"I believe they'd act like two baa-lambs if anyone showed any sense anywhere. . . . There'd be shamrock wreaths around both necks in no time if Heaven sent us a shepherd with two ideas in his head!"

"And Serbia? You see I've the ignorance of a year to make up." (He said nothing of his intervening visit. Perhaps she was happily ignorant of those emotional weeks).

"Serbia! . . ." Katty's face clouded. "We'll hear great things from there, Meredith Dyfed says, after a little. But in the meantime, as in the past, as ever since 1915, we've all failed her. We've all stood by and gaped at a Crucifixion . . . not the Calvary of an individual, but of a nation. I mustn't let myself go on Serbia, Horace, even to you. . . . But now that proud little country is pulling herself out of the hole, alone!"

"And your delightful Serbian friends, Captain . . ." Horace sought for the name . . . "Boyovich?"

"Dead."

"I'm really sorry," Horace exclaimed.

"He died fighting . . . a good death, as Crystal said." She looked at him curiously. Grimmer had left them with their coffee.

"Why . . ." he started to say, "why Crystal in that connection?" but paused.

"Of course you didn't know," Katty went on, "that Boyovich adored Crystal."

Horace hoped she did not realise what a cold shock her words had given him.

"It meant a great deal to Crystal, I think," she continued, "to have been loved by so fine and splendid a type as the *Guslar*. I could see it restored her in her own estimation after . . ."

"After such a cad as I," Horace said bitterly. "Go on, Katty, put it any way you like."

"He died calling her name, calling on her and Serbia! That is a claim to immortality for my beautiful sister, isn't it?"

Horace stirred his coffee without looking at it or at his hostess.

"You think I'm a skunk, don't you, Katty?"

Katty was lighting a cigarette. "We can't all be heroes, or poets or patriots," she told him.

"I see you know about Crystal!" he said, after a while.

"She didn't tell me till this last journey to America," Katty replied, "and then she didn't tell me very much. You know, for a talkative family, we say very little, even to each other."

"I know, and it's fine of you," Horace said gratefully. "I dare say Crystal would never have told you at all if a divorce didn't mean a certain amount of publicity. Did you know she tried once before to divorce me, same grounds, desertion, and I spoiled it at the last moment by walking in on it?"

"No! but why, why, Horace Dimock, did you do that?" Katty was bewildered.

"I couldn't bear to let her go when it came to the point."

"How like you, Horace!" Katty smiled almost tenderly at him.

"Wasn't it? And if I had had the moral courage, I'd stop this last divorce, too. But I simply can't face it. And she would never understand, even if she took me back, that my various infidelities, actual and emotional, don't mean a basic infidelity to her."

"You'll admit it would take rather a broad gauge affection," Katty remarked dryly, "to stand for that, my friend."

"You'd be sufficiently broad gauge, Katty!"

"I'm not so sure," mused Lady Freke. " I know that men like you . . . constitutionally disloyal, do exist. But my own experience has never proved it. The men I've known, my three husbands, my two sons, my best friends, Norton, Dyfed, Allen Pearce, Francis Morrill . . . my beloved Boyovich and Stefan, all have been faithful, both by nature and circumstances. Of course, a variation in species would be entertaining . . . to study. But I'm afraid I'd soon revert, in sentiment, to the monogamous type."

"When we come right down to it, Katty," Horace had the air of making a point, "what's the difference between my disloyalties and yours?"

"You mean I've had three husbands and you only

two wives? You score there . . . but I had 'em one at a time. There I score! Yet perhaps 'tisn't so much a matter of figures as of feelings. A man I knew . . . a delightful person, who'd had as many affairs as, I gather, you have, said to me once, 'I have only one thing to be proud of . . . I have never made a woman shed a tear!' And I can honestly say, I never made Merton White, or Tom McCarthy, or Blundell Freke, unhappy, or even discontented, for one tiniest second."

"I can't say anything like that." Horace was walking up and down now. "Alas, Katty, you'd be sorry for me if you knew what ghosts haunted me."

"I know some of them," Lady Freke reminded him. "Leonora, Alpha, Crystal. You can hardly call Daphne a ghost, as you didn't make her suffer . . . you only enraged her."

"Yet she haunts me, too. Perhaps it's more my own egotism, in her case. Where is Daphne now?"

"They're moving about, still in the United States."

"They?" queried Horace. "She and Crystal?"

"O my friend, didn't you know? Wait a moment." She went to a desk and brought back a letter addressed to himself, with "Please forward" on it. "I knew from Peter Norton that you were *en route,* and so kept this."

Horace opened it with a somewhat dreary heart . . . it was so obviously wedding cards. And there he read:

Mrs. McClinton
announces the marriage of her niece,
Daphne Frances O'Brien,
to
Captain Stefan Dakovich,
of the Serbian Army,
in San Francisco,
June Tenth, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty

"That has just come," Katty was explaining as Horace read and re-read the announcement, biting his lip unconsciously. "Stefan arrived there ten days before that, from Siberia. He had been a prisoner in the hands of the Bolsheviki, and nearly killed. Daphne had not heard one word from him till they met in the streets of San Francisco. You knew it was a violent love-at-first-sight affair? He discovered her in Holland, where she took refuge from . . ."

"From me, I know," Horace offered grimly.

"And when she found him again, lame, shabby, weary, without a penny in the world, with no future so far as she knew, she was for marrying him at once, that very day. But the boy insisted on waiting till he communicated with his Chief in New York, and with his government at Belgrade. I suspect Merton and Crystal pushed things along . . . your Serb is a hero, but he's no hustler! Anyway, he got his captaincy, all his back pay, two over-due medals, for courage, bless him! and a special mission to the United States which will keep

them there till autumn. And evidently they were married . . . all within ten days."

"Hm," was all Mr. Dimock said.

"Crystal writes that it was the prettiest idyll any human being could imagine. And my beloved sister has materialised it to the extent of settling a small annuity upon Daphne." (Lady Freke did not say that she had done the same.) "And it all satisfies every instinct for the right outcome. Daphne will find him, and his life, his country, his ideas, very, *very* different. But that very difficulty will inspire her. She's as capable as all the rest of us put together. What a mother she'll make! and what gorgeous children they'll have. . . . Did you know that there was hardly a child born in Siberia in three years? That's one of the things the war did there."

Horace walked away from her to the end of the room.

When he came back he stood over her, leaning on the chair next her.

"What is Crystal going to do?" he asked with an effort.

"Oh, she'll stay with Merton till he gets his discharge . . . and—incidentally, my friend—she has still her own divorce to put through. Then she'll return to the Pond House. There will be great need of her down there. And she plans to take on Belgian, Serbian and other children in relays, so to speak. Crystal is a saint. And like all saints, she'll lead a self-sacrificing but dull life. It's the

sinners like you and me, Horace, who have the good times."

"I've made a pretty failure of life, haven't I?" he said, half quizzically, half mournfully.

"I'm afraid Mr. Dimock loses out!" drawled Katty, in her most American accent. "But you're still a fine figure of a man . . . only you're not lighted from within, my friend. It's an outside brilliancy. But you'll break a lot of hearts yet, Horace!"

"Hearts! umph. It's not hearts I want, it's brains. It's companionship, someone to enjoy the world with."

"You mean someone with a sense of humour . . . a hard-faced widow," Lady Freke looked wicked.

"A widow, not hard-faced, but with a sense of humour . . . that would be ideal." Horace, saying this, looked down on his friend with very handsome eyes indeed.

"Isn't it George Harvey says no one but a widow must tackle any man over forty?" Lady Freke suggested.

"Only a widow is tolerant," Horace opined. "No spinster, of any age, forgives easily."

"And a married woman is always risky, eh?"

"You *do* despise me, don't you, Katty?" he resented this.

"I don't respect you," admitted his friend candidly. "But 'tis a far cry from that to despising. And your career, except where it hurt Crystal, is deeply interesting to me."

"It would be even more interesting if I told you

the half of it," observed Mr. Dimock gloomily.

"'Tis very nice in you to tell me anything."

"You're the sort of woman a man can tell things. You've tolerance . . . chief of all virtues."

"Well, if three husbands, nearly four, wouldn't make me tolerant," Katty tossed back, "what would?"

"Nearly four?" Horace took her up quickly.

"Yes. I may marry again . . . sometime . . . There are too many widows in the world. Don't laugh."

"I never felt less like it." Horace moved away from her a little.

"My dear boy, don't look as though you'd lost a friend! I shall probably be at home first Tuesdays."

"Please . . . Katty! I've lost more than you realise." Horace sat down again, rather heavily.

"Bless my soul! was the man going to propose to me?"

"I believe I was." Horace put it whimsically. "At least, as soon as I was free!"

"Dear old Horace! I adore proposals, even when they don't mean much."

"This would have meant the best that's in me," her guest said, rather nobly.

"No, your sense of humour would have stopped you. 'The Undeceased Wife's Oft Widowed Sister!' It wouldn't have done, my dear boy."

"Who is it? Dyfed, I suppose," Horace rather stated it than asked.

"Meredith Dyfed? Didn't you know he loved poor Alicia?"

"Absurd! at his age!" Horace returned.

"Horace, you are inimitable. He's a year your junior."

"So poor Dyfed carries a scar? Hm. Who is it, then?"

"Francis Morrill, and he's years younger than I am, so I'd never be a widow again."

Horace was silent. If he'd been asked, before this conversation, whom he considered the finest man in England, he would have said Francis Morrill. Generosity made him express something of this now.

"Thank you, Horace. I have known only two finer spirits in my whole forty-seven years . . . the Chief, I mean Mr. Redmond, and my own son."

"Hazleby," Horace nodded affirmatively. (A mother's weakness for a dead child, of course.)

"No, Merton."

Her friend was genuinely surprised.

"One can't think in terms of the individual now," Katty went on, with none of her usual flippancy. "Francis, who'd like to marry me next week, and whom I could, I think, make quite happy . . . Francis stands to me for something more than that. He stands for the genuine aristocrat of the world, good sport, far-seeing statesman, England at her very finest. But Merton, whom I have never made quite happy—(no child likes to have a light-minded mother!) Merton, whom Daphne refused to make happy; whom now one sees always lonely . . . Merton

who has given an arm to his country, and must go maimed for life . . . it is in Merton I see the hope of the future."

"You mean young America?" Horace interrupted her.

"Yes. I didn't know my own country before this war. It's only now I know my own son. But at last I see them both. And the world will be saved through them . . . through youth and the ideal at the heart of youth. A practical ideal at the heart of young America.

"You make me feel elderly and useless," Horace said.

"No, only middle-aged," Katty nodded at him, and at her own reflection in the mirror. "And no candle burns inside you, Horace. You expect all the illumination to be offered outside on your altar."

There was a ring at the door.

"I hear Meredith Dyfed," she said. "He brings me the latest news every night. Will you see him?"

"No, Katty. It's good-bye . . . for a long time."

And Mr. Dimock betook himself, unlighted, into the outer darkness of the London night.

THE END

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